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Sea Swallow

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Bullers Albatross *Diomedea bulleri*, 38°21'S 140°32'E off Pt MacDonnell, S Aust. 14th Mar 2004. *Photo:* NG Cheshire

OFFICERS OF THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRDWATCHING SOCIETY

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For details of Local Representatives and other useful addresses, see page 68.
Subscription rates: Full and associate members £12 annually. Due 1 January.
Library rates: Cost of *Sea Swallow*, (£10) plus postage.
Membership: has been widened from the RN to include those, regardless of nationality, who share a common background of the sea.
Aims and Activities: The primary aim of the Society is to promote a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and of landbirds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare-time recreation and hobby. The secondary aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist ashore. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, usually in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.
RNBWS Record Forms: Standardised forms for recording Seabirds and Landbirds at sea, Seabird Census sheets and Birds examined in the Hand (BEH) forms have been designed for use at sea. Stocks are held by The Honorary Secretary. Please give detailed requirements and enclose a large (A4) stamped and self addressed envelope.
Completed Record: Forms (both Seabirds and Landbirds) should be sent to the Editor of *Sea Swallow*.
Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the Editor. Instructions to authors can be found on page 68.
An application form for membership is at page 65 of this edition of *Sea Swallow*.

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PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

Amongst the treasure trove of material in the 53 volumes of *Sea Swallow* is a remarkable series of articles covering a decade of bird observations along the Fly River in Papua New Guinea, starting in 1987. The articles provided a very vivid picture of a beautiful but vulnerable area, and the early warning in them of the impact of logging was drawn to the attention of our Patron. The author was Captain David Simpson MN, an inveterate traveller and major contributor to the RNBWS database, and later in this volume you will find an obituary tribute to him. However, his legacy will not be confined to the records which he left behind. Plans are under development to use a very generous donation to RNBWS in his will to promote the sort of travel and observing which he would have welcomed. Our Merchant Navy Vice Chairman, Captain Neil Cheshire, is leading the thinking of the Executive Committee on the launch of a David Simpson Scholarship to provide mentoring and encouragement of new observers, and I look forward to seeing a new generation of talent emerge.

Another benefactor was Colonel Peter Smith RM, who stood down as Honorary Secretary in October 2002. He very much championed the revival of field work and expedition activities, and I am sure that he will share my pleasure at the news of a further RNBWS expedition to Diego Garcia, planned for the great sea year of 2005. Meanwhile, the latest fruits of the endeavours of our Expedition Member, Captain Peter Carr RM, will be found in this new volume of our journal. I hope that you will be inspired to join in our activities in some way.

DAVID DOBSON President

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Whilst I am currently travelling marginally more than in my final years in the RN, rather too much of my time is spent in the anonymous surroundings of airports and meeting rooms. However, I have managed to achieve two sea trips in recent weeks. The crossing to Roscoff always brings the welcome company of the gannets of the Channel, with a fleeting glimpse of some distant storm petrels on this occasion. Another ferry transit, this time to Kythnos in the Aegean in early September, brought sightings of small groups of *Puffinus p. yelkouan*. Otherwise I have had to be content with snatched forays to the shores of ports as far afield as Lima, Cartagena, Dakar and the West African rivers, Mumbai, Jakarta and Shanghai. A few moments within reach of the thronged shores of the creeks of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund were particularly tantalising.

Within days of writing this foreword, I will fly off for five full days of meetings in Fiji, the scene of some of my first substantial contributions to the RNBWS records. What memories it will stir! I hope to encourage some of my contacts to pick up an interest in the seabirds around them. Can I also encourage any readers who are still out there watch-keeping to enjoy to the full the privilege of the opportunities it brings? So often it has been the alert amateur observer who has provided a vital and vivid record. Please enjoy the examples in this volume, and carry on watching!

MICHAEL BARRITT Chairman

EDITORIAL

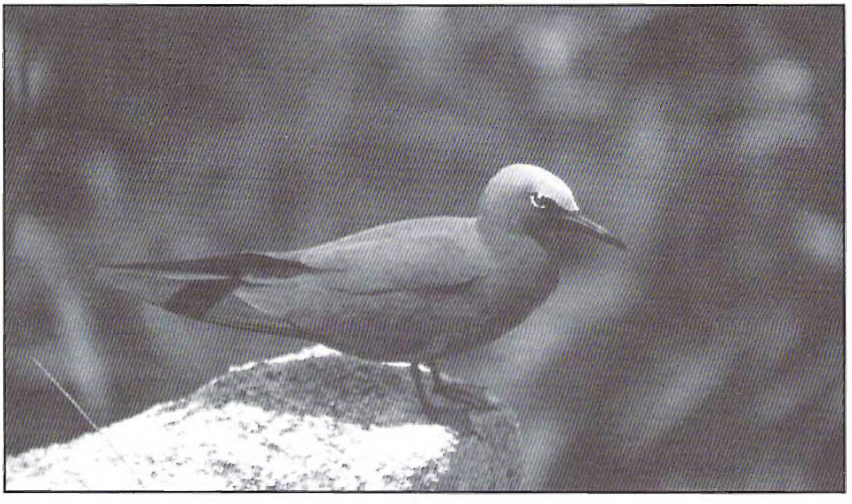
With *Sea Swallow 52* only being published in February of this year, I have taken the opportunity to delay slightly the publication of this edition. Normal service will be resumed with the prompt appearance of *Sea Swallow 54* in October 2005. All contributions will be most welcome.

This edition contains the usual mix of articles, but the contributions from Anand Prasad deserve particular mention. He is a new author for *Sea Swallow* and he is making a significant contribution to the knowledge of seabird distribution around the Indian subcontinent. Additionally, I have taken the opportunity to relate, briefly, some of my experiences whilst based in Southern Iraq last year.

This year has seen the loss of two stalwarts of the Society - although Captain Simpson died in 2002, news of his death did not filter through to the Society until earlier this year when details of a significant legacy for the RNBWS was made known. He had been a regular contributor to Sea Swallow and his contribution is recorded in an obituary in this issue. Captain Tom Barlow also died earlier this year; his contribution and support to the Society was immense. To do his memory justice an obituary has been delayed until the next edition. Both men will be greatly missed by the Society.

2005 has the potential to be a very exciting year. The expedition to Diego Garcia in the spring along with the introduction of the David Simpson scholarship herald a new phase of the development of the RNBWS. These ventures will be fully reported in future issues of *Sea Swallow*; along with, I sincerely hope, your own records and articles.

GARY LEWIS Editor



Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Cousin Island, Seychelles, 4.8.97.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

NOTES ON SEABIRD REPORTS RECEIVED IN 2003/4

By N.G.Cheshire

This year there are a few but mostly large contributions. David Ballance continues to take long passages on merchant ships to make continuous and detailed bird observations and has recently written an informative article on the subject in *British Birds* (Ballance 2004). Steve Hales reports on 'Atlantic Odyssey' a birding expedition from Antarctica to the UK via all the main Atlantic Islands which produced some very interesting observations. Perhaps others will be inspired to find time to record birds during their voyages.

OBSERVERS

Mr. David K.Ballance m.v.*Canmar Venture.* NW Europe to Montreal and return, Aug-Sept 2003. 23 page bound report.
Mr. Stephen Chapman sts *Lord Nelson.* Canary Islands, March 2004.1C
Capt. N.G.Cheshire r.v. *Franklin.* Cairns-northern PNG-Rabaul-Solomon Islands-Coral Sea, March-April 2002. 17C.
Dr. David Close m.v. *Polar Pioneer.* Ushuaia-Falklands-South Georgia-Antarctic Peninsula-Ushuaia. Jan 2004. 20 page bound report.
Mr. Steve Hales m.v. *Professor Molchanov.* Ushuaia-Antarctic Peninsula-South Geogia-Gough I.-Tristan da Cunha-St. Helena-Ascension I. Cape Verde Is. -Azores-UK. March-May 2003. 28 page report.

R-RNBWS Report Sheets, C-RNBWS Census Sheets, B-RNBWS Bird in hand Forms, N - other notes, P - Photographs.

NOTES ON SPECIES

(Dates refer to 2003 unless otherwise mentioned. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of a degree, nm = nautical miles, tmc = ten minute count, hrc = hourly count

PENGUINS *SPHENISCIDAE*

King Penguin ***Aptenodytes patagonicus.*** Heading NE from South Georgia with icebergs in the area, SH saw six at 51.9S 33.7W, five at 51.6S 33.2W and six at 50.4S 31.3W on 25 March.

Emperor Penguin ***Aptenodytes forsteri.*** SH saw three on an ice floe at 62.5S 50.8W NE of the Antarctic Peninsula on 19 March.

Gentoo Penguin ***Pygoscelis papua.*** SH recorded several off the Antarctic Peninsula at 63.5S 56.9W on 17 March. In the South Orkney area he saw two at 60.8S 45.5W, nine at 60.8S 45.2W and 10 at 60.6S 45W on 20 March.

Adelie Penguin ***Pygoscelis adeliae.*** SH saw many at 63.5S 56.9W on 17 March, 12 the next day at 63.8S 57.3W, many on icebergs at 62.6S 51.2W on 19 March and four at 60.7S 45.5W near the South Orkney Islands on 20 March.

Chinstrap Penguin ***Pygoscelis antarctica.*** SH observed eight at 60.9S 61W in Drake Passage on 16 March. He saw large numbers around the South Orkneys on 20 March with 40 at 60.8S 45.2W, thousands including a large feeding flock on the sea at 60.7S 44.9E and hundreds on icebergs at 60.3S 44.5W and 60.2S 44.2W. The next day he saw 20 at 57.3S 39.5W

Macaroni Penguin ***Eudyptes chrysolophus.*** On the 25 March NW from South Georgia, SH recorded 10 at 51.4S 32.9W, 10 at 51.3S 32.8W, three at 51S 32.3W and five at 50.8S 32W.

Magellanic Penguin ***Spheniscus magellanicus.*** DC observed 20 in the Beagle Channel on 8 Jan'04.

ALBATROSSES *DIOMEDEIDAE*

Wandering Albatross ***Diomedea exulans.*** SH recorded sub-species *exulans*, 5 at 56.5S 65.1W in Drake Passage on 15 March, small numbers throughout the day on 21 March between 57.3S 39.5W and South Georgia, and one at 51S 32.4W and one at 50.6S 31.7W on 25 March. North of the Antarctic Convergence he reported *dabbenena* in small numbers from 44.7S 22.7W on 27 March to Gough Island 40.5S 10.2W on 29 March. NE from Tristan da Cunha on the 2 April he reported small numbers throughout the day between 35S 11.6W and 34S 11.2W, the most northerly sighting.

Royal Albatross ***Diomedea epomophora.*** DC observed eight Southern Royals *epomophora* and two Northern Royals *sanfordi* between Staten Island and the Falklands on 9 Jan'04. SH recorded 4 Southern Royals at 56.5S 65.1W in Drake Passage on 15 March.

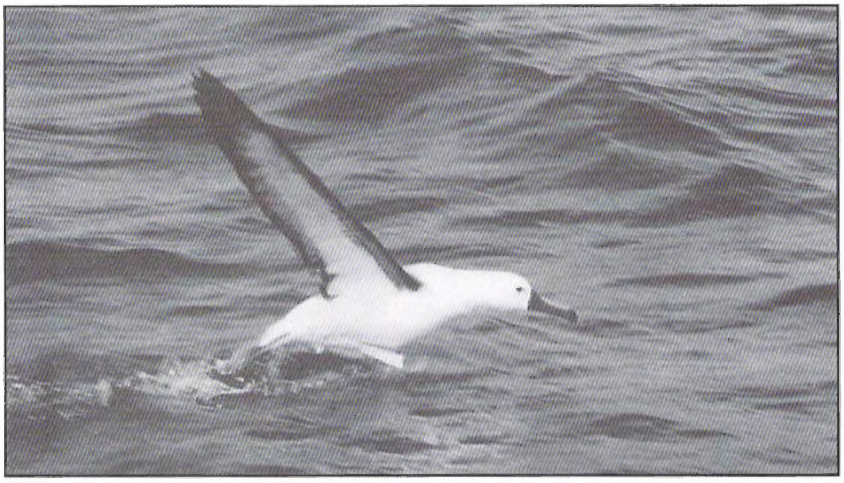
Black-browed Albatross ***Diomedea melanophris.*** In Drake Passage SH recorded five at 56.5S 65.1W on March 15 and occasional birds north of the Antarctic Peninsula with the most southerly records of one at 62S 60.1W on 16 March and two at 62.1S 49.8W on 19 March. Thereafter during March he recorded small numbers of one to four birds throughout each day from 60.7S 45.4W near the South Orkneys on the 20th to South Georgia then NE to 41.8S 14W off Gough Island on the 28th. DC observed 300, nearly all adult birds between Staten Island and the Falklands on 9 Jan'04.

Shy Albatross ***Diomedea cauta.*** DC saw one nominate race bird at 54S 63.5W SW of the Falklands on 9 Jan '04. Distribution, abundance and behaviour of Chatham Island (Shy) and Salvin's (Shy) Albatrosses off Chile and Peru has now been described. (Spear *et al* 2003).

Yellow-nosed Albatross ***Diomedea chlororhynchos.*** SH recorded 35 at 40.1S 10.1W near Gough Island on 28 March.

Grey-headed Albatross ***Diomedea chrysostoma.*** During March SH observed eight at 56.5S 65.1W in Drake Passage on the 15th and two at 62.2S 50.2W on the 19th. From near the

South Orkneys 60.6S 44.9W on the 20th to South Georgia then NE towards Gough Island he recorded small numbers, one to four each day until the last at 44.7S 22.7W on the 27th.



Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos*. Tristan da Cuhna, January 2003. *Photo:* G D Lewis

Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria fusca.* On passage from South Georgia to Gough Island 26 to 28 March 50.4S 31.3W to 41.8S 14W SH had many records with a maximum count of seven at 46.9S 25.9W on 26th. On April 2 NE from Tristan he saw one at 35S 11.6W, two at 34.7S 11.5W and single birds during the day north to 33.2S 11W.

Light-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata.* SH saw one at 62S 60.1W near the South Shetlands on 16 March. He also recorded them on 21 March with four at 58S 40.6W and then throughout the day in small numbers to 56.7S 38.5W.

FULMARS *FULMARINAE*

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus.* SH recorded five at 60.9S 61W near the South Shetlands on 16 March, six at 63.5S 56.9W on the 17th, 13 at 63.7S 56.8W on the 18th and small numbers during the 19th on his way to the South Orkneys (60.5S 45W).There he saw 30+ at 60.7S 44.9W on 20 March, small numbers throughout the day on 21 March from 58S 40.6W to 56.3S 38.1W, one at 51.6S 33.2W on 25 March, one at 47.4S 26.7W the next day, two at 41.8S 14.2W on 28 March and the last at 35S 11.6W on April 2.

Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli.* SH saw single birds on 25 March NE of South Georgia from 50.7S 31.8W to 50.3S 31.2W, one at 48S 27.6W on 26th and one at 41.2S 15W on 28 March.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis.* DKB saw two at 49.7N 0.6W off Le Havre on 21 Aug and singles the next day in the North Atlantic at 50.2N 8.6W and 50.6N 10.1W. Westbound he then saw them each day to the Strait of Belle Isle with maximum hrc of 71 at 52.9N 24.4W on 23 Aug, max hrc of 43 at 53.5N 38.7W on 24th and max hrc of 20 at 52.2N 53.1W on

25th. A total of 260 gathered around his ship whilst it was stopped for five hours at 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug. He recorded four singles in three hours around 49.5N 63.5W and 49.9N 60.2W in the northern Gulf of St Lawrence on 2 Sept. During his east bound return voyage numbers in the western and central Atlantic had increased with hrc of 124 at 52.4N 51.1W and 307 at 52.7N 47.5W on 3 Sept, max hrc of 216 at 53.4N 36.4W on 4 Sept and max hrc of 37 at 52.9N 24.5W.

Southern Fulmar ***Fulmarus glacialoides.*** Many were seen by SH at 62S 60.1W near the South Shetlands on March 16. Further east towards the South Orkneys on the 19 March he observed them all day including three at 62.8S 51.9W, six at 62.7S 51.5W, 200+ at 62.1S 49.8W, 78 at 62S 49.2W. Small numbers were seen around the South Orkneys on 20 March and the next day between 60.6S 44.9W and 56.5S 38.3W.

Antarctic Petrel ***Thalassoica antarctica.*** SH enjoyed the magnificent sight of 450+ sitting on top of icebergs and the frozen sea with Snow Petrels at 62.7S 51.9W on 19 March. Later the same day he saw flocks of 200+ at 62.6S 51.2W, 400+ at 62.5S 50.8W, 500+ at 62.5S 50.7W.

Cape Petrel ***Daption capense.*** SH recorded many between 60.9S 61W and 62S 60.1W near the Antarctic Peninsula on 16 March and two at 62.8S 51.9W on 19 March.

Snow Petrel ***Pagodroma nivea.*** Recorded by SH from the Antarctic Peninsula and South Orkneys with three at 63.5S 56.9W on 17 March and two at 63.3S 56.8W the same day, four at 63.5S 55.8W on 18 March, 200+ at 62.7S 51.9W resting on icebergs and the frozen sea, 400+ at 62.3S 50.8W, 150 at 62.5S 50.7W all on 19 March.

Kerguelen Petrel ***Lugensa brevirostris.*** Seen between the South Georgia area and Gough Island by SH with the first five at 58S 40.6W on 21 March thereafter in small numbers throughout each day until the 29 March when 28 were seen at 40.1S 10.1W close to Gough Island.

Broad-billed Prion ***Pachyptila vittata.*** Observed by SH approaching Gough Island from the SW with two at 44.3S 22.1W and a max count of 10 at 44S 20.3W on 27 March, several on 28 March with three at 42.1S 15W and four at 40.1S 10.1W on 29 March.

Antarctic Prion ***Pachyptila desolata.*** Recorded by SH between the Antarctic Peninsula, South Georgia and Gough Island, 19 - 29 March. Maximum daily counts were 25 at 62.1S 49.8W on 19th 60+ at 60.6S 44.9W on 20th, five at 57.9S 40.5W on 21st, four at 50.7S 31.8W on 25th, two at 48S 27.6W on 26, 100+ each at 44.6S 22.2W, 44.5S 22.1W, 43.8S 20.2W on 27th, 16 at 42.1S 15W and 87 at 40.1S 10.1W on 29th.

Narrow-billed Prion ***Pachyptila belcheri.*** SH reported six at 56.5S 65.1 W in Drake Passage on 15 March and two at 62.1S 49.8W on 19 March.

Fairy Prion ***Pachyptila turtur.*** Reported by SH on 26 March between South Georgia and Gough Island with singles at 48S 27.6W, 47.6S 27.2W 47.6S 27W and 47.4S 26.7W.

Blue Petrel ***Halobaena caerulea.*** SH observed this species between the South Orkneys and South Georgia area. The first were on 20 March with three at 60.6S 44.9W, 10 at 60.3S 44.5W and 55 at 60.2S 44.2W. On 21 March he saw 11 at 57.9S 40.3W and then had the wonderful sight of 'hundreds' flying in front of a snow squall that passed over his ship at 56.8S 38.6W. Later another 31 were seen flying ahead of a weather front at 56.7S 38.5W. He also saw one at 50.3S 31.1W on 25 March and another single at 47.6S 27W the next day.

Tahiti Petrel ***Pterodroma rostrata.*** One at 15.7S 164E in the eastern Coral sea on 16 April' 02(NGC).

Great-winged Petrel ***Pterodroma macroptera.*** SH recorded a few from an area SW of Gough Island and NE of Tristan with singles at 47.4S 26.7W on March 26, at 41.9S 14.4W on March 28 and at 35S 11.6W on April 2 with two the same day at 34.7S 11.5W.

Atlantic Petrel ***Pterodroma incerta.*** Approaching Gough Island from the southwest SH saw his first Atlantic Petrel at 44.6S 22.2W with two at 44.3S 21.6W, three at 44S 20.7W and three at 43.8S 20.2W on 27 March. He had several observations of two or three birds on 28 March between 42.6S 16.4W and 41.8S 14W. He counted 83 at 40.1S 10.1W close to Gough Island on 29 March. After departing from Tristan he saw singles at 35S 11.6W and 34S 11.2W on 2 April.

Fea's Petrel ***Pterodroma feae.*** Two were reported by SH at 20.4N 24.9W north of the Cape Verde Islands with two more an hour later to the north.

Soft-plumaged Petrel ***Pterodroma mollis.*** SH had many records north of the Antarctic Convergence with 15 in Drake Passage at 56.5S 65.1W on 15 March, seven at 51.9S 33.8W on 25 March thereafter frequent sightings with max counts of 16 at 47.4S 26.7W on 26th, 16 at 43.8S 20.2W on the 27th and six at 42.6S 16.4W on the 28th. NE from Tristan he saw six at 34.7S 11.5W and the last three at 34S 11.2W on 2 April.

Collared Petrel ***Pterodroma (leucoptera) brevipes.*** Gould type petrel with medium grey breast and belly and dark upper breast band, white chin at 12.3S 167.3E in the south Solomons on 15 April'02(NGC).

Bulwer's Petrel ***Bulweria bulwerii.*** A large series of observations by SH from the sub-tropical and tropical North and South Atlantic in April. Records included the first at 25.3S 8.4W on the 4th, four at 20.5S 7.1W on the 5th, two at 14.6S 7.1W on the 9th, one at 9.5S 12.8W on the 10th, two at 0.9S 17.2W on the 14th at 4.5N 19.3W on the 15th, two at 8.1N 20.8W on 16th six at 11.9N 22.3W on 17th, 15 at 20.3N 24.9W on the 20th and the last one at 25.1N 25W on the 21st.

SHEARWATERS ***PROCELLARIINAE***

Grey Petrel ***Procellaria cinerea.*** Seen by SH north of the Antarctic Convergence between South Georgia and Gough Island during March. The first of several singles was seen at 51.5S 33.2W on the 25th. Most were seen on the 26th, including three at 48.2S 27.9W, six at 47.3S 26.7W and 29 on the sea at 46.7S 25.6W.

White-chinned Petrel ***Procellaria aequinoctialis.*** Observed intermittently by SH from South Orkneys to South Georgia on to Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha. The first one was at 62S 49.3W on March 19 with a few on 20 March and a max count of five at 60.3S 44.5E. Seen in small numbers throughout the day on 21 March from 58S 40.6W to 56.7S 38.5W. On March 25 again seen in small numbers throughout the day between 51.9S 33.8W and 50.6S 31.7W. Two were seen at 41.9S 14.4W on 27 March and they were seen all day in small numbers on April 2 between 35S 11.6W and 33.2S 11W. The final one was seen at 30.1S 10W on 3 April.

Spectacled Petrel ***Procellaria conspicillata.*** There were several observations by SH from the South Atlantic in the general area of Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha (37S 12.3W) where it breeds, including two at 44.3S 21.6W on 27 March, one at 41.9S 14.4W and two at 41.8S 14.2W on 28 March. Heading NE from Tristan on 2 April he saw eight at 35S 11.6W, nine at 34.2S 11.3W, 18 at 34S 11.2W, 10 at 33.2S 11W and the final seven the next day at 30.1S 10W.

Streaked Shearwater ***Calonectris leucomelas.*** Recorded from the wintering area around PNG with a feeding flock of 50 at 7.4S 148E in the western Solomon Sea on 4 March'02, 150 at 4.4S 146.1E off the north coast on 8 March'02 and a flock of 200 nearby at 3.4S 144.7E on 12 March'02 (NGC).

Cory's Shearwater ***Calonectris diomedea.*** Several records from SC in the Canary Islands during March'04 including 10 at 28.1N 15.1W on 9th, flocks of 50 at 28N 14.5W and 27.9N 14.3W on loth and 10 at 27.1N 14.9W on 13th. Heading north from Tristan da Cunha during April SH saw the first at 30.1S 10W on 3rd, singles at 25.3S 8.4W on 4th, at 4.8S 15.6W on 13th, 11 at 1N 18.1W on 14th, one at 5.8N 19.9W on 15th, one at 11.9N 22.3W on 17th and one at 33.2N 25.1W on 23rd. During his return North Atlantic voyage in late Summer DKB recorded the species in mid and eastern Atlantic with two at 50.6N 10.1W SSW of Ireland on 22 Aug, six at 51.3N 13.1W the same day, one at 52.7N 22.6W, 19 at 52.9N 24.4W, 24 at 53.2N 27.7W and six at 53.3N 29.7W all on 23 Aug, one at 53.5N 37W on 24 Aug, one at 52.7N 22.6W, two at 50.8N 11.2W on 6 Sept and four at 50.4N 9.1W south of Ireland the same day.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater ***Puffinus pacificus.*** Small numbers throughout day with a max tmc of eight at 13.5S 148.4E in the Coral sea on 2 March'02, 40 feeding at 8.8S 157.2E south of Rendova, Solomon Is on 28 March, one at 12.3E 167.3E near Santa Cruz Is. on 15 April (NGC).

Great Shearwater ***Puffinus gravis.*** Recorded by SH from the Antarctic Convergence NE towards Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha during March including one at 51.8S 33.7W, 108 at 51.6S 33.2W, 200 at 51.4S 32.9W and continuously to 50.3S 31.1W on 25th, six at 48.3S 28.8W, 200 at 47.4s 26.7W, 275 at 47.2S 26.4W on 26th, small numbers between 44.7S 22.8W and 43.8S 20W on 27th, also between 42.6S 16.4W and 41.8S 14W on 28th. Just one was seen north of Tristan at 35S 11.6W on 2 April. It was numerous across the North Atlantic in late Summer with DKB recording one at 51.3N 13.1W and max hrc of 52 at 53.3N 29.7W on 23 Aug, max hrc of 125 at 53.3N 38.7W on 24 Aug, 12 at 52.2N 53.1W and one at 51.5N

56.5W approaching Strait of Belle Isle on 25 Aug. When his ship was stopped for five hours at 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug 110 gathered in the vicinity. Eastbound he had max hrc of 36 at 52.6N 49.9W on 3 Sept, max hrc of 347 at 53.4N 38.6W on 4 Sept, 14 at 52.9N 24.5W on 5 Sept, an hrc of 492 at 50.8N 11.3W 50 nm SW of Mizzen Head, an hrc of 88 at 50.4N 9.1W and two singles at 49.8N 7W west of Scilly on 6 Sept.

Sooty Shearwater ***Puffinus griseus.*** DC saw a few in the Beagle Channel on 8 Jan'04. SH saw one at 57.3S 64.3W in Drake Passage on 15 March and a few between South Georgia and Gough Island including four at 51.4S 32.9W on 25 March, two at 47.6S 27W, six at 47.2S 26.4W on 26 March and two at 44.5S 22.1W, one at 44S 20.8W on 27 March. In the North Atlantic DKB saw mostly single birds with one at 52.9N 24.4W, three at 53.2N 27.7W on 23 Aug, three singles at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug, four singles flying S at 52.4N 51.1W, one at 52.6N 4 49.9W, one at 52.7N 47.5W on 3 Sept, one at 53.4N 38.6W, three singles at 53.4N 36.4W, one at 53.4N 33.2W on 4 Sept, one at 52.7N 22.6W and one at 52.3N 19.9W on 5 Sept.

Short-tailed Shearwater ***Puffinus tenuirostris.*** Seen in the Coral Sea area on their northward migration in 2002 all flocks were flying NNE and included 300+ at 12.2S 167.6E in the south Solomons on 12 April, 30 at 15.7S 164E west of Vanuatu on 16 April and 50+ at 19.1S 160.8E east of the Chesterfield Group on 19 April (NGC).

Manx Shearwater ***Puffinus puffinus.*** Seven were seen by SH in the Bay of Biscay at 47.4N 8.2W on 29 April. During his return North Atlantic voyage DKB saw a few in the open ocean and more in the western approaches with five at 52.9N 24.4W, two at 53.2N 27.7W on 23 Aug, singles at 53.5N 37W and 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug, one at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug, one at 53.4N 33.2W on 4 Sept, one at 52.3N 19.9W on 5 Sept three at 50.8N 11.3W, 15 at 50.4N 9.1W and 15 at 49.8N 7W on 6 Sept.

Little Shearwater ***Puffinus assimilis.*** Recorded during March by SH from north of the Antarctic Convergence NE to Gough Island with two at 48.2S 27.9W on the 26th, two at 44.6S 22.2W, seven at 44S 20.8W, six at 43.8S 20.2W on the 27th, two at 42.4S 15.8W, six at 42.3S 15.6W, three at 42.1S 15W, three at 41.9S 14.2W on the 28th and 262 on 29th at 40.1S 10.1W close to Gough Island, where it is a winter breeder.

Audubon's Shearwater ***Puffinus l'herminieri.*** Ten birds at 10.9S 167.2E southern Solomons on 14 April'02 had white underbodies and underwings and blackish brown upperparts with small white flank patches when seen from above were presumably the local race *gunax*. (NGC)

Heinroth's Shearwater ***Puffinus heinrothi.*** One at 6.4S 154.7E 22 nm west from Bougainville Island on 27 March' 02 (NGC).

DIVING-PETRELS ***PELECANOIDINAE***

Magellanic Diving-petrel ***Pelecanoides magellani.*** DC reported 'many' in Beagle Channel on 8 Jan'04.

STORM-PETRELS *HYDROBATIDAE*

Wilson's Storm-petrel ***Oceanites oceanicus*** . SH recorded many in the Weddell Sea between 63.8S 57.3W and 63.5S 55.8W on 18 March. From 19 March to 2 April he recorded small numbers every day to South Georgia then on to Gough I. and Tristan da Cunha. The last was seen at 30.1S 10W on 2 April. DKB saw two at 52.9N 24.4W in the North Atlantic on 23 Aug.

White-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta grallaria.*** Seen by SH from north of the Antaretic Convergence to Gough Island and Tristan da Cunha where it breeds in the southern Summer. The first four were seen at 48S 27.6W on 26 March and other sightings included 12 at 44.2S 21.4W on 27 March, 12 at 43.8S 20.2W the same day, six at 42.1S 15W on 28 March and the last three at 33.2S 11W on 2 April.

Black-bellied Storm-petrel ***Fregetta tropica.*** SH saw one at 57.3S 64.3W on 15 March and many later the same day at 60.9s 61W near the South Shetlands. His subsequent records included eight at 62S 49.W on 19 March, eight at 60.3S 44.5W on 20 March, three at 57.6S 40W on 21 March, six at 51.8S 33.7W on 25th March and the last at 44.6S 22.2 W on 27 March. One was seen at 19.1S 160.8E in the Coral Sea on April 17'02(NGC).

British Storm-petrel ***Hydrobates pelagicus.*** One Atlantic record at 41.8N 18.3W on 27 April(SH).

Madeiran Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma castro.*** Recorded during April by SH from the normal east Atlantic range. Limiting records and larger numbers included six at 20S 6.9W on the 5th, 15 near Speery Island St Helena on the 8th, three at 13.8S 8W on 9th, three on the Equator at 17.6W on 14th, a feeding flock of 47 at 4.2N 19.2W on 15th, three at 8.4N 20.9W on 16th and the last one at 24N 25W on 21st.

Leach's Storm-petrel ***Oceanodroma leucorhoa.*** SH recorded small numbers during April from near Ascension Island to the Azores including one at 9.7S 12.4W on 10th, two at 7.7N 20.7W and three at 9.3N 21.3W on 16th, three at 12.7N 22.6W on 17th, two at 19N 24.9W on 20th, two at 25.2N 25W on 21st, three at 30.9N 25.1W on 22nd, eight at 35N 25.1W on 23rd and the last five at 40.5N 20.8W on the 26th. In the western North Atlantic DKB saw nine singles flying SW at 52.5N 50.4W on 25 Aug, 111 singles and groups (hrc 33) also moving SW at 52.2N 53.1W later the same day, eight at 52.4N 51.1W on 3 Sept. He also observed 36 at 49.5N 63.5W in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence on 2 Sept.

TROPICBIRDS *PHAETHONTIDAE*

Red-billed Tropic Bird ***Phaethon aethereus.*** SH recorded one at 25.3S 8.5W south of St Helena on April 4. 10 close to Ascension I. on 12 April and 10 between Santiago and Sao Vincente Cape Verde Islands on the 18 April.

White-tailed Tropic Bird ***Phaethon lepturus.*** SH saw 50 close to Ascension I. on 12 April. One at 15.5S 164.2E west of Vanuatu on 16 April'02 (NGC).

GANNETS AND BOOBIES *SULIDAE*

Northern Gannet ***Morus bassanus.*** DKB saw 17 adults and 8 sub-adults in the Dover Straits at 50.8N 1.1E and 90 adults and 18 sub-adults approaching Le Havre on 20 Aug. Further west in the Atlantic he recorded 72 adults and 2 sub-adults at 50.6N 10.1 on 22 Aug, three adults at the entrance to Strait of Belle Isle 51.5N 56.5W on 25 Aug and one sub-adult at 52.6N 21.6W on 5 Sept. In the Gulf of St Lawrence he saw four at 50N 62.2W and two at 50N 64W on 26 Aug, 76 adults and 29 sub-adults at 49.9N 60.3W on 2 Sept.

Masked Booby ***Sula dactylatra.*** In the equatorial east Atlantic SH saw one at 10.4S 11.8W on 10 April, two at 5.8S 15.3W and one at 3.8S 16W on the 13 April.

Brown Booby ***Sula leucogaster.*** Three at 7S 148E western Solomon Sea on 4th March'02, two at 3.5S 144.9E on 11 March'02, one at 3.4S 144.9E the next day and 10 feeding at 4.1S 145E off northern PNG on 18 March'02. Two were seen at 6.4S 154.7E SW from Bougainville I. on 27 March'02 (NGC).

Red-footed Booby ***Sula sula.*** One at 13.8S 148.2E and another at 13.5S 148.4E in the Coral sea on 2 March'02(NGC).

CORMORANTS *PHALACROCORACIDAE*

Antarctic Shag ***Leucocarbo (atriceps) bransfieldensis.*** SH observed 1000+ at Paulet I. 63.6S 55.8W on 18 March. 15 in the South Orkneys at 60.7S 45.5W and a feeding flock of 750 at 60.7S 44.9W on 20 March.

FRIGATEBIRDS *FREGATIDAE*

Ascension Frigatebird ***Fregata aquila.*** 100+ at 7.9S 14.4W near Ascension I. on 11 April(SH).

Lesser Frigatebird ***Fregata ariel.*** One at 10.1S 150.9E in southern PNG waters and a feeding flock of 50 with Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Sooty Terns at 8.8S 157.2E southern Solomons (NGC).

PHALAROPES *PHALAROPODIDAE*

Red-necked Phalarope ***Phalaropus lobatus.*** A feeding flock of 150+ on the sea at 5.4S 147.3E off the north coast of PNG on 6 March'02(NGC). DKB saw a flock of five flushed from an area of floating weed at 50N 64W in the northern Gulf of St Lawrence on 26 Aug.

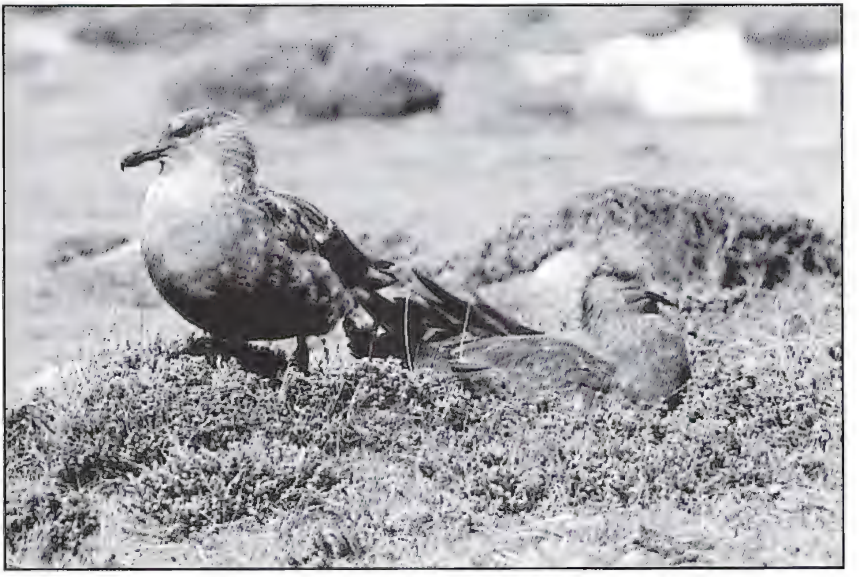
Phalarope Sp DKB reported two singles at 49.9N 60.3W in Gulf of St. Lawrence on 2 Sept and in the North Atlantic, 64 he considered probably Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* at 52.4N 51.1W on 3 Sept, a group of six at 52.7N 47.5W later same day, three at 52.3N 19.9W on 5 Sept and seven at 50.4N 9.1W on 6 Sept.

SHEATHBILLS *CHIONIDIDAE*

Yellow-billed Sheathbill *Chionis alba.* SH observed 20 at Paulet Island 63.6S 55.8W on March 18 and one at 60.7S 45.4W two days later.

SKUAS AND JAEGERS *STERCORARIINI*

Great Skua *Catharacta skua.* DKB observed a few in the Channel and nearby with two singles at 50.1N 0.1E on 20 Aug, one at 49.7N 0.5W on 21 Aug, two at 50.5N 1.3E and 8 singles Dover Straits to Thames approaches 51.5N 1.3E on 7 Sept. During his return voyage to Canada he had a few sightings in the Atlantic with one at 52.9N 24.4W and one at 53.2N 27.7W on 23 Aug, two at 53.4N 38.8W and one at 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug, one at 52.3N 19.9W on 6 Sept and two at 50.4N 9.1W south of Ireland on 7 Sept.



Antarctic Skua *(Catharacta (a) antarctica)* at nest, Pebble Island, Falklands, Nov 96. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

Southern Skua *Catharacta (a) antarctica.* SH recorded all *catharacta* skuas seen in the southern ocean except obvious South Polar Skuas under this form. He saw four at 63.3S 56.8W on 17 March, 17 at 63.6S 55.8W on 18 March, four at 62.7S 51.9W on 19 March, five at 60.4S 45.3W on 20 March, one at 51.8S 33.7W and one at 51S 32.3W on 25 March, two at 41.9S 14.4W on 28 March and one at 41.8S 14W the same day.

South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki.* One pale phase bird seen well at 7.4S 148E in the western Solomon Sea on 4 March'02 and another large skua in the distance at 3.5S 144.9E off north coast of PNG on 11 March'02 was this species or Southern Skua (NGC). Recorded around the Antarctic Peninsula and South Orkneys by SH with three at 63.5S

56.9W, 14 near Devils Island 63.8S 57.3W on March 17, one at 62.7S 51.9W and three at 62.5S 50.8W on 19 March.

Chilean Skua ***Catharacta (skua) chilensis.*** DC reported several in the Beagle Channel with Southern Skuas on 8 Jan'04. He noted that for every obvious Chilean Skua he saw two indeterminate types, possibly Southern/Chilean hybrids.

Pomarine Skua ***Stercorarius pomarinus.*** Two feeding at 3.5S 144.9E off north coast of PNG on 11 March and two nearby at 3.4S 144.9E the following day(NGC). In the North Atlantic SH saw four at 44.2N 14.1W on 28th April. DKB recorded one at 53.4N 38.7W on 24 Aug, four dark adults flying S at 52.5N 50.4W and two at 52.2N 53.1W the next day, two in the Gulf of St Lawrence at 49.5 63.5W on 2 Sept, 17 light and one dark bird singly and in groups at 52.4N 51.1W, four at 53.3N 32W on 4 Sept, four at 52.7N 22.6W and on at 52.3N 19.9W on 5th Sept.

Arctic Skua ***Stercorarius parasiticus.*** One in the Atlantic at 28.8N 25W on 22 April (SH). Records from the North Atlantic by DKB had a ratio of dark morph to light morph birds of 5:1. Observations included six at 52.9N 24.4W, eight at 53.2N 27.7W, two at 53.3N 29.7W on 23 Aug, two at 53.4N 38.7W, one at 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug, four at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug, one at 52.4N 51.1W on 3 Sept, one at 53.4N 33.2W on 4 Sept, three at 52.7N 22.6W and three singles in Thames approaches at 51.4N 1.3E on 7 Sept.

Long-tailed Skua ***Stercorarius longicaudus.*** SH saw one at 25.3S 8.4W on 4 April, a remarkable 200+ with Arctic Terns at 0.8N 18W and a second flock of 220+ one hour 15 minutes later on 14 April, four at 4.2N 19.2W on 15 April, one at 11.9N 22.3W on 17 April and one at 24N 25W on 21 April.

GULLS ***LARIDAE***

Ring-billed Gull ***Larus delawarensis.*** DKB observed one adult at 51.5N 56.5W at the entrance to Strait of Belle Isle on 25 Aug.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ***Larus fuscus.*** DKB recorded 94 adults and 15 imm around fishing boats off Le Havre on 20 Aug and 31 adults at 49.7N 0.5W Baie de la Seine the next day. In mid Atlantic he saw one imm at 53.3N 32W on 4 Sept and an adult at 52.7N 22.6W the following day.

Herring Gull ***Larus argentatus.*** DKB observed 710 adults around fishing vessels at 50N 0.1E off Le Havre on 20 Aug and 50 imm nearby at 49.7N 0.5W the next day. In Canadian waters he saw one adult at 51.5N 56.5W in the Strait of Belle Isle on 25 Aug, three adults at 50N 62.2W and five at 50N 64W on 26 Aug, 54 adults and 20 imm at 49.7N 65.5W on 2 Sept. Single immatures were seen in the Atlantic at 52.2N 52.7W on 3 Sept and at 50.4N 9.1W on 6 Sept.

Kumlien's Gull ***Larus (glaucoides) kumlieni.*** DKB reported one adult at 50N 64W in the Gulf of St Lawrence on 26 Aug.

Great Black-backed Gull ***Larus marinus.*** DKB had several records in the Channel and in eastern Canadian waters during Aug and Sept. He found it common in the St Lawrence all the way to Montreal on 27 Aug. He saw 131 adults and 20 imm including 120 around the East Goodwin light vessel, at 51.3N 1.3E in the Dover Straits on 7 Sept.

Kelp Gull ***Larus dominicans.*** SH provided some records from well south around the Antarctic Peninsula and the South Orkneys with six at 63.5S 56.9W on 17 March, two at 63.8S 57.3W, nine at 63.7S 56.8W, 40+ at 63.6S 55.8W on 18 March and 13 at 60.7S 45.5W on 20 March.

Little Gull ***Larus minutus.*** DKB saw four adults just outside Le Havre harbour entrance on 20 Aug and 17 adults the next day in the same position feeding over the ship's stirred up wash.

Sabine's Gull ***Larus sabini.*** SH had two sightings in the tropical Atlantic with one at 4.3N 19.2W on 15 April and another at 8.2N 20.9W the next day. He also saw two adults at 44.5N 13.7W well west from NW Spain on 28 April.

Adult Heermann's Gull *Larus heermani*, Monterey Bay, California, USA, 27.5.92. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

Black-legged Kittiwake ***Rissa tridactyla.*** Many records from DKB from the Channel right across the Atlantic to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and return in late August and early September. Of note were 210 adults and five imm which accumulated around his ship during a five hour stoppage at 53.4N 40.7W on 24 Aug and an hrc of 317, almost all adults at 52.4N 51.1W on 3 Sept.

TERNS ***STERNIDAE***

Arctic Tern ***Sterna paradisaea.*** A large number of records of migrating birds from SH in the South and North Atlantic during April with the first five at 28.5s 9.5W on the 3rd, five

at 23.5S 8.5W and five at 24.4S 8.2W on the 4th. He then saw them every sea-going day in mostly small to moderate numbers from the 9th to the 28th 14.6S 7.1W to 45.5N 11.9W. Larger concentrations included 40+ at 10.4S 11.8W on 10th, 150+ with Long-tailed Skuas at 0.8N 18W on the 14th, 110+ at 9.3N 21.3W on 16th , 24 at 11.8N 22.2W on 17th 84 between Santiago and Sao Vincete Cape Verde on 18th. Further north numbers tapered off and it would appear the main migration was passing through the tropical Atlantic in mid April.

Antarctic Tern ***Sterna vittata.*** Observations by SH in the area South Shetlands, Antarctic Peninsula to South Orkneys during March included 10 at 63.3S 56.8W on 17th, nine at 63.8S 57.3W, 62 at 63.7S 56.8W, 14 at 63.6S 55.8W on the 18th , 30 at 62.7S 51.9W and 20 at 62.5S 50.7W on the 19th one at 60.7S 45.4W and five at 60.7S 44.9W on 20th.

Sooty Tern ***Sterna fuscata.*** Observations during March'02 included two at 13.7S 148.3E in the Coral sea on the 2nd, six at 10.1S 150.9E southern PNG waters on 3rd, 60 at 7.4S 148E western Solomon Sea on 4th, feeding flock of 60 at 3.4S 144.7E off northern PNG and 30 feeding at 8.8S 157.2E near Rendova I.Solomons on 28th. During April'02 a feeding flock of 200+ at 10.9S 167.2E southern Solomons on 14th and one at 12.3S 167.3E on the 15th (NGC). In the tropical Atlantic SH counted 223 in flocks in 1.5 hrs c.9.6S 12.6W on 10 April, 10 at 5.3S 15.4W on the 13 th and three at 0.9S 17.2W on 14 April.

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata.* Bird Island, Seychelles, Aug 97.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

Swift Tern ***Sterna bergii.*** In northern PNG waters, 10 at 3.5S 144.9E on 11 March'02 and 30 feeding at 4.1S 145E on 18 March'02 (NGC).

Brown Noddy ***Anous stolidus.*** A flock of 50 at 7.4S 148E in the western Solomon sea on 4 March'02 and 10 at 4.4S 146.1E off northern PNG on 8 March' 02 (NGC).

White Tern ***Gygis alba.*** One at 4.4S 146.1E off northern PNG on 8 March'02 (NGC).

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*. Bird Island, Seychelles, Aug 97.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

AUKS *ALCIDAE*

Razorbill *Alca torda*. One adult was seen by DKB at 50N 64W in the northern Gulf of St Lawrence on 26 Aug, two at 52.2N 52.7W and one at 52.4N 51.1W in the western North Atlantic on 3 Sept.

Brunnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*. Approaching the Strait of Belle Isle at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug DKB saw 60 Auk sp. of which some were identified as Brunnich's.

Guillemot *Uria aalge*. DKB saw one adult at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug and one at 49.9N 60.3W in the Gulf of St.Lawrence on 2 Sept.

Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*. DKB recorded one adult at 52.2N 53.1W on 25 Aug and two at 52.2N 52.7W on 3 Sept in the approaches to Strait of Belle Isle.

Puffin *Fratercula arctica*. Several records from Canadian waters by DKB who saw two at 52.2N 53.1W and 10 at 51.5N 56.5W, Strait of Belle Isle on 25 Aug and seven at 50N 64W in northern Gulf of St Lawrence the next day. On his return voyage he observed two at 49.9N 60.3W Gulf of St Lawrence on 2 Sept, six at 52.4N 51.1W and six at 52.6N 49.9W in the western North Atlantic on 3 Sept.

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THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN IRAQ (SOUTH OF BASRA) - JUL TO DEC 2003

Basra Palace environs. Sept 2003. *Photo:* Lt Cdr GD Lewis.

As with many 'closed' countries, regular bird records from such areas can be hard to obtain. Iraq has been a good example of this. There are many records coming out of all the surrounding countries - Jordan and Kuwait to name but two. Following the 1st Gulf war in 1991, access to the country for supposedly spurious activities such as bird watching was impossible for all westerners, and since the 2003 conflict, and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime, the country is still not stable enough to encourage traditional tourism in the accepted sense. This is a great pity because Iraq boasts some great archaeology and, as I discovered, the potential for great birdwatching.

In July 2003, I was given short notice to go to Iraq as part of a small RN team. Our aim was to train and equip the Iraqi Riverine Patrol Service, basically the river police, based in Basra. The team spent 5 months in theatre, living in the dubious luxury of Saddam's palace to the south of the city, and during the period I kept records of all the species seen. Bird watching was not an easy occupation; although recording from the palace was safe, once outside the security area, birding was carried out from the comparative safety of high speed convoys. Stopping at key locations was for short periods only, so 'speed' ID and counts were perfected very quickly!

Whilst not specifically a seabird article, I feel that as a member of RNBWS, the right place to publish these records is within the covers of *Sea Swallow*. As to the importance of some records, further research is required to ascertain the scarcity of Red-necked Stint *(Calidris ruficolli)* in Iraq.

Key Areas and Important Records

Basra Palace

Built by Saddam in the late 1980s, Basra Palace is located at the southern edge of Basra, adjacent to the Shatt al 'Arab. It was built on an area of parkland previously accessible to all Iraqis. The palace covers about 8 square kilometres and is completely enclosed with a high wall. There are a number of pools and an area of scrubland within. During 2003, the Palace was used as the Brigade HQ and was the secure location for the Royal Naval Training Team.

The palace grounds were a magnet for a small visible migration, particularly September and October. Key species were Lesser Short-toed Lark *(Calandrella rufescens)* on 24 Sep 03, Olivaceous Warbler *(Hippolais pallida)* on 9 Nov 03 and Grey Hypocolius *(Hypocolius ampelinus)* on 29 Oct 03. Additionally, a White Wagtail *(Motacilla alba)* of the race *personata* was with a small group of the nominate race on 29 Oct 03.

Resident birds appeared to be a pair of Red-wattled Plover *(Hoplopterus indicus)*, 3 pairs White-cheeked Bulbul *(Pycnonoyus leucogenys)*, Pied Kingfisher *(Ceryle rudis)* and 250 House Sparrow *(Passer domesticus)*.

Shatt al 'Arab (Basra to Al Fawr)

This is the main waterway from the northern Gulf up to the port of Basra. About 200 metres wide, it was dredged to accommodate large merchant vessels allowing them access to Basra, which pre 1991 was Iraq's main port. The Shatt forms the border with Iran for part of its length and has been a flash point between the two countries in the past.

Shatt al 'Arab waterway just south of Basra, S Iraq, August 2003. *Photo:* GD Lewis.

The waterway is tidal up to Basra and the average tidal range was between 1 and 2 metres. Outside the confines of Basra, the waterway is bordered by marshy land with numerous small

Desert Scrub (and camels) Um Qasr, S Iraq, October 2003. *Photo:* GD Lewis.

tributaries feeding into it. Currently the Shatt is un-navigable for large vessels up to Basra due to the number of hulks abandoned throughout its length.

Three key species groups were recorded on the Shatt al 'Arab - Herons, Waders and Gulls/Terns. There was also a significant raptor movement in late October/early November.

A single trip in to the marshland on the opposite bank of the Shatt al 'Arab, with a local guide and a detachment of Royal Marines produced the endemic Basra Reed Warbler *(Acrocephalus griseldis)* on 28 Oct 03.

Shaibah Pools (8km west of Basra)

A number of freshwater pools either side of the road leading to Shaibah oil refinery. They run for about 4 km, but those nearest to the refinery are heavily contaminated with oil.

These pools were a magnet for 'fresh' wader passage with regular movement of waders through the area. It was difficult to record numbers as the road was deemed dangerous and both visits and stops were restricted. However, I managed to spend some time on both 11 and 13 Aug 03 where I recorded 15 species of wader. The highlight of the two visits was a summer plumaged Red-necked Stint *(Calidris ruficolli)*, the status of which in Iraq needs further research.

Umm Qasr and Environs

The second port for Iraq and to the south of Basra almost on the Kuwaiti border. Currently this is the only port access for Iraq and consequently is very busy and heavily protected. Outside the port area, the environment is desert and arid scrubland.

Classic desert species were recorded from this area; again care had to be taken and stops were restricted. There was a lot of abandoned ordnance including anti-personnel mines and

armoured vehicles. Crested Lark *(Galerida cristata)* were common, but there were also records of both Desert Lark *(Ammomanes deserti)* and a single Hoopoe Lark *(Alaemon alaudipes)* from a site about 5km north of Umm Qasr port. Additionally, there were single records of Hume's Wheatear *(Oenanthe alboniger)* in the port area and Red-tailed Wheatear *(Oenanthe xanthoprymna)* from Al Zubayh port on 12 Nov 03.

Bird Records

Species as listed in the RNBWS Checklist of Seabirds (Oct 96), along with dates, for the period 19 July - 6 December are attached as an annex with comment where necessary. Obviously, these records are only a snapshot of the avifauna for southern Iraq, but it is intended they be published for furthering the knowledge of this under recorded area of the Middle East.

Gary Lewis
Royal Naval Training Team
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Basra Palace

LIST OF RECORDED BIRD SPECIES ON THE RNBWS CHECKLIST OFSEABIRDS (OCT 96) S IRAQ - JUL to DEC 03

Species	Comment
Pygmy Cormorant *Microcarbo pygmeus*	1 north on 14 Nov
Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*	1 dark phase north on 28 Aug
Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*	1 adult winter on 2 Nov
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundu*	4 adult winter north on 14 Nov
Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*	2 adult summer 21 Jul
	1 adult north 27 Oct
	1 adult 1 Nov
Whiskered Tern *Caledonians hybridus*	1 adult NNE on 28 Jul
	1 adult on 14 Sep
	1 adult on 1 Nov
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*	Regular with a peak of 50+ on 24 Sep (both ad & juv)
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*	2 adults fishing on 28 Aug
	11 adult winter on 1 Nov
Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*	2 adults south on 3 Aug
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*	2 south on 27 Oct
Little Tern *Sterna alifrons*	8 fishing on 31 Aug
Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*	1 adult north on 11 Sep
Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicencis*	5 adults loitering on 31 Aug

All the above records are from the Shatt al 'Arab adjacent to Basra Palace. (30°40'S, 49°E)

SKUA *(STERCORARIUS)* SPECIES IN THE EASTERN ARABIAN SEA

Anand Prasad

Review of the literature

There are various and contradictory views on the distribution of the two *Stercorarius* species in the eastern Arabian Sea.

The main source of information for Skua species is Olsen & Larsson (1997), which gives the winter distribution of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* as being throughout the Arabian Sea. The distribution of Parasitic (Arctic) Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* is given as only along the far western region of the Arabian Sea, except in spring, on the Pakistan coast, where it is 'scarcer than Pomarine Skua' and according to the map, apparently migrating northwards inland. The references given for the west coast of India are Madsen (in litt.) and Ali & Ripley (1969) but a closer look at these references in the more recent edition, Ali & Ripley (1983) are far from conclusive.

Ali & Ripley (1983) considered *parasiticus* to be the only species present in Pakistan and recorded it as 'not very uncommon along the Makran coast (W. Pakistan),' and also quoted Sinclair (1977), who recorded both *pomarinus* and *parasiticus* from the coast of Bombay, with only 2 individuals of *pomarinus* recorded on only one day but with *parasiticus* recorded 'almost daily and may have involved five individuals,' on several days observing between 26-28/10/74 and 17-20/10/74.

The other source given in Olsen & Larsson (1997) for the presence of only *pomarinus* off the west coast of India is not corroborated by the literature. Madsen (1990) was very uncertain of the identity of most of the skuas he observed off the coast of Gokarn, northern Karnataka in September-November 1987 but thought that 'a few birds apart, all appeared to be Arctic skuas' and only positively identified *parasiticus*, with 1 on 6/9/87 and 1 on 22/11/87. This was further confirmed by Lainer (1999) who wrote of *parasiticus*, 'Madsen (1988) had observed them frequently off the coast at Gokarn (North Kanara), *ca.* 140km south of Anjuna, between September 1987 and January 1988. When Madsen and I visited the Vengurla Rocks off Malwan (Sindhudurg dist., Maharashtra), only 45km north of Anjuna, in March 1989, we saw several parasitic skuas every day.' It is possible that Madsen has since changed his mind on the identification of the species, he was previously uncertain about, which would be unacceptable without photographic evidence. Perhaps Madsen has done further unpublished research on the subject, but, without confirmation, this is conjecture.

Off the Pakistan coast, Roberts (1991) gives the general status of *parasiticus* as 'Frequent' and records small numbers throughout the winter months and June and July, as well as a possible, westerly spring passage, although confusingly and probably in deference to Ali and Ripley (1983), he gives the status of *pomarinus* as 'Scarce,' even though he found the latter species to be the more common. He recorded *pomarinus* in the winter months and September, April, May and June.

Grimmett *et al.* (1998), have, in general followed Olsen & Larsson (1997), and in Pakistan followed Roberts (1991), reiterating the main status claim of 'Scarce' for *pomarinus* in the

latter, based on Ali & Ripley (1983), but have omitted the contradictory conclusion in Roberts text, and also confusingly, have ignored altogether, Ali & Ripley's claim, that *pomarinus* was an 'accidental vagrant' throughout the subcontinent.

Harrison (1985) maps both species as present throughout the Arabian Sea from November to March.

In Sri Lanka, Harrison (1999), in general, followed Olsen & Larsson (1997).

Ali and Ripley (1983) records *parasiticus* as 'not very uncommon' in Pakistan, and cite Butler (1877), Phillips (1947) and Hume as their source. Elsewhere they only give the records of Sinclair (1977) at Bombay for this species.

As mentioned previously, *pomarinus* is given by Ali and Ripley (1983), the status of 'accidental vagrant' in the Indian subcontinent, and although Sinclair's record at Bombay is mentioned, the only record accepted, is apparently from Colombo, Sri Lanka (Wait 1931). This unsupported status given by them, for *pomarinus* along the Indian coast, is (correctly) unaccepted by all previous authors and it is therefore illogical to repeat this error by referring to *pomarinus* as 'Scarce' in Pakistan (Roberts 1991, Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

Details of Parasitic (Arctic) Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* records in the eastern Arabian Sea:

Pakistan 'this species is regular in spring, but scarcer than Pomarine Skua (Olsen & Larsson 1995).

Pakistan
Small numbers visit the coastal waters of Sind and Makran mainly from the post monsoon months until the following spring, with some evidence of an annual spring passage along the coast. On 13 March 1981, 12 birds all believed to be this species, flew past Cape Monze in a westerly direction over a three hour period, (R. Passburgh with times 40 telescope pers. comm.). At the mouth of rivers, the major creeks and lagoons such as Pitiani and Khudi creek on the Indus, the Hab river and Sonmiani lagoon, and birds usually as single individuals, have been sighted in December, January and February each winter (9 observations) in 3 annual surveys by boat. On 12 December 1983 one pale phase adult bird at the mouth Khudi creek, Indus delta. Summer sightings include one on 6 June 1980 off Cape Monze and a dark morph bird on 13 June 1981. Recent records (N. van Zalinge, R. Passburgh, K. Forssgren, and author) suggests that it may be less common than *S. pomarinus* in the winter months. Status, Frequent.' (Roberts 1991).

Pakistan During a sea voyage along the Makran coast to Iran, about 12 between Pasni and Gwadur between 14 and 17 May (Butler 1877).

Pakistan 'Not very uncommon along the Makran coast (W. Pakistan) where Hume met with it at sea off Omrara Gwadur, Pasni, etc. from middle to end February.' (Ali & Ripley 1983).

About 150km southwest of Karachi at about 24°02'N 65°49'E. 1 possible on 7/7/45. (Phillips 1947).

Bombay Colaba Point. Sighted almost daily and may have involved five individuals,' on several days observing between 26-28/10/74 and 17-20/10/74. (Sinclair 1977, Ali & Ripley 1983).

Bombay Elephanta, 1 in January 1996 (Wanders 1996).

Vengurla Rocks 'When Madsen and I visited the Vengurla Rocks off Malwan (Sindhudurg dist, Maharashtra), only 45km north of Anjuna, in March 1989, we saw several every day.' (Lainer 1999).

Vengurla Rocks near Burnt Island,? flock in monsoon 2000, seen by 'the authors,' although it is doubtful whether the observers had any past experience with the species (Pande *et al.* 2003). The view held by Ali & Ripley (1983) and which is repeated in the text of Pande *et al.* (2003), that Pomarine Skua was a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent may have influenced the identification of this record, further details necessary (Pande *et al.* 2003).

Vagator, Goa 1 skua pirating a Brown-headed Gull and the same size as the Brown-headed Gull on 2/4/04 was probably this species (David Stanton in litt. 19/4/04).

Goa on 28/8/03, 2 on 1/9/03, 1 on 24/9/03, 2 on 27/9/03, 2 on 28/9/03, 3 on 7/10/03, 1 on 9/10/03, 2 on 11/10/03, 7 on 12/10/03, 2 on 13/10/03, 2 on 14/10/03, 1 on 16/10/03. Virtually all flying south, (AP pers. obs.).

Goa Fort Aguada, 3 on 25/8/02, 3 on 26/8/02, 1 on 28/8/02, 2 on 1/9/02, 2 on 3/9/02, 1 on 4/9/02,4 on 8/9/02 (Mark Newsome in litt. 10/02).

Goa 'I have 5 records of ones and twos off the coast of Anjuna (Bardez), in September. I am sure they are much more frequent visitors to Goa's coast than these few records suggest,' (Lainer 1999). In Lainer (2004) he retracts these identifications at the species level and records a total of 18 individual of *Stercorarius* species between 1990 and 2001, with 6 between March and June and 12 between September and November.

Goa 5 miles off coast, 1 pale morph on 29/11/98 (Wielen & Leegwater 1998).

Gokarn Kamataka, Uttar Kannad, 1 on 6/9/87, 1 on 22/11/87 (Madsen 1990).

About 40km west of Chavakkad, Kerala at 10.7°N 75.6°E., 20 tentatively identified on 27/2/90, by M.F. Finn (Cheshire 1991).

About 300km west of Calicut, Kerala at 9.25°N 75.5°E. 1 on 10/5/67, by D. Stam, (Bourne & Dixon 1973).

Sri Lanka 'Winter vagrant to NE coastal waters,' (Harrison 1999).

Details of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* records in the eastern Arabian Sea:

Arabian Sea 'regular wintering occurs off Pakistan and southern India' (Olsen & Larsson 1995).

Pakistan 'On 12 December 1983 one pale phase adult (Arctic Skua) was seen roasting close to 2 Pomarine Skuas at the mouth Khudi creek, Indus delta.' (Roberts 1991).

Pakistan 'recent observations suggest (Passburgh, Forssgren and author) that it is not so rare along the Karachi seacoast, where it is more likely to be encountered than *S. parasiticus*. A maximum number of 7 have been sighted in one day's boat trip off the Indus mouth, and individuals have been positively identified in all winter months, as well as during September and April and June by several independent observers, and good photographs of swimming and flying birds have helped to confirm identification (Walter Weitkowitz, November 1982, N. Van Zalinge, December 1983, K. Forssgren, May 1980, pers. comm., also author with R. Passburgh numerous observations, December to April, and in June).' (Roberts 1991).

Indian Subcontinent 'Accidental vagrant. A single specimen taken at Colombo in 1912 (Wait 1931) is the only record from Indian waters. Two adults sighted, Bombay (Sinclair 1976).' (Ali & Ripley 1983).

Bombay Colaba Point, '2 adults seen pursuing an immature Herring Gull,' with several days observing between 26-28/10/74 and 17-20/10/74 (Sinclair 1977, Ali & Ripley 1983).

Ten miles off Bombay 1 observed chasing terns on 18/10/62, by N.G. Cheshire (Bourne 1965).

Goa 1-2 on 28/8/03, 1 on 9/9703, 2 on 21/9/03, 1 on 22/9/03, 1 on 24/9/03, 1 on 28/9/03, 1 on 1/10/03, 1 on 2/10/03, 3 on 5/10/03, 2 on 6/10/03, 5 on 11/10/03, 4 on 13/10/03, 2 on 14/10/03, 1 on 15/10/03, 1 on 16/10/03, 1 on 19/10/03. Virtually all flying south. (AP pers. obs.).

Goa Fort Aguada, 2 immatures on 26/8/02 (Mark Newsome in litt. 10/02).

Goa nearly 20km off shore from Baga, 1 in November 2000, by Tony Marr +2, (Alastair Henderson in litt. 19/2/01).

Goa 1 off the coast of Goa in 3/93, by Paul Willoughby (Willougby 1996, Harris 1996).

Goa unreviewed (Tostain & Balanca 1985).

About 300km west of Mangalore at 12.45°N 72.00°E, 1 on 9/11/69 (RNBS database, *Sea Swallow* 24:86).

Off Lakshadweep at 12°45'N 72°E, 1 on 9/11/69, by P.W.G. Chilman (Bourne & Dixon 1975).

About 60km west of Kavaratti, off Mt Delly, Lakshadweep at 11.3°N 73.0°E, 6 on 16/12/67, harrying Sooty Terns (RNBS database, Bourne & Dixon 1973).

Lakshadweep at 10°53'N 72°45'E, 1 probable on 5/4/65 (Pocklington 1967).

About 50km south of Cape Comorin at 7°45'N 77°45'E, 2 on 28/3/69, by P.W.G. Chilman (Bourne & Dixon 1975).

Sri Lanka 'Regular summer visitor to S and W coastal waters.' (Harrison 1999).

Off southwest Sri Lanka at 6.2°N 80°E, 2 on 21/9/58, by S. Gorton Green (Cheshire 2003).

Off Colombo, Sri Lanka at 6.9167N 79.8333E, undated, (RNBS database).

About 50km off the coast of southwest Sri Lanka at 6°N 80°E, 1 on 27/3/69, by P.W.G. Chilman (Bourne & Dixon 1975).

Maldives just north of H.A. Kelaa at 7°00'N 73°10'E, 1 on 21/2/99, by R. Charles Anderson and Ian Rowlands (Anderson & Baldock 2001).

Maldives to the east of H. Dh. Kumundhoo at about 6°34'N 73°04'E, 1 on 14/3/99, by R. Charles Anderson (Anderson & Baldock 2001).

Maldives in the One-and-a-half-Degree-Channel, at about 1°19'N 73°19'E, 2 on 8/3/00, by R. Charles Anderson and Mark Baldock (Anderson & Baldock 2001).

Maldives near K. Kaashidhoo at about 5°03'N 73°34'E, 3 on 31/3/00, by R. Charles Anderson (Anderson & Baldock 2001).

Conclusions

The only specimen from the region was of *pomarinus* taken from near Colombo (Wait 1931).

In the absence of a records committee for the region, there is obviously a degree of uncertainty in the sight records, however, there are several records of *parasiticus* by experienced observers along the west coast of the India, and some have found *parasiticus* to be the more common *Stercorarius* species (Mark Newsome in litt. 10/02, Sinclair 1977).

My personal observations led me to the conclusion that both species are present in good numbers in the southern migration in August-October along the Goan coast and although nearly one third (22) of the total of 86-87 individuals of *Stercorarius* observed were unidentified to the species level, the proportion of identified *pomarinus* (28-29) was roughly equal to *parasiticus* (26). The number of unidentified individuals, makes any idea of the real proportion difficult, although I am inclined to believe that *pomarinus* was the more common species.

The number of sight records of *pomarinus* within the region far outweighs those of *parasiticus* and although further expert observations, would be useful, it seems that *parasiticus* may be the least common, but regular visitor. Most sightings of both species appear to be on passage in the late and post-monsoon months, although there are evidently small numbers of both species present throughout the winter.

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ROSEATE TERN *STERNA DOUGALLII* OFF THE WEST COAST OF INDIA

Observations during daily three hour sea-watches off Fort Aguada, Bardez, Goa from 16/8/03 until 23/10/03, with several trips to Chapora estuary, gull and tern roost from 3/9/03 until 29/10/03.

Anand Prasad

Personal observations and discussion with local birders Heinz Lainer (HL) and Gordon Frost (GF) has highlighted some interesting information on the race of Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* migrating south in large numbers in autumn, which may all be from the breeding colony on Vengurla Rocks, just north of Goa in Maharashtra, but may also, due to the sheer numbers involved, include migrants from further north, in the Middle East. An estimated 5,000-7,500 pairs bred on Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks in 1989 (Lainer 2003, Lainer 2004) although Mark Newsome (MN) recorded 3,559, with only 27.4 hours seawatching at Fort Aguada, Goa, in 11 days from late August to early September 2002 (MN in litt. 10/02).

Small migrating flocks of Roseate Terns were noted on virtually all days from 25/8/03 up until the last day of sea-watching 23/10/03 (pers. obs.), although most birds were too far out to notice much detail.

HL and GF were the first to observe that all adult Roseate Terns observed closely in the post-breeding season between mid-August and late September at the Chapora estuary, Bardez, Goa had an all red-bill (pers. comm., Lainer 2004) and this was confirmed by prolonged observation of a flock of 100+ adults feeding for more than 30 minutes close in at Anjuna, Bardez, Goa on 18/9/03 (pers. obs.). Birds observed on that day all appeared to have an all red bill. At a range of sometimes down to 100 metres, (with a Kowa ED TS 613 scope at 30 times magnification), no black was noticed on the bill tip. I made frequent trips to the roost sites at Chapora estuary/Morjim beach between 3/9/03 and 29/10/03 in the hope of seeing an adult at even closer range, but none were located.

An undated photograph of a perched adult Roseate Tern taken on Burnt Island, Vengurla Rocks by Saleel Tambe was published on p.138, in Pande *et al.* 2003. The extreme tip is obscured by a fish but there is no visible black showing on the bill tip. The undated photograph captioned 'Common Tern' on the same page and taken by the same photographer is however very interesting; this specimen is clearly another adult Roseate Tern, showing the diagnostic white to the inner web of the inner primaries, and clearly showing the light-grey tail longer than the wings. This bird shows a totally red bill slightly less red-pigmented in the terminal third. These two photographs may also be of the same individual as both have white speck behind the bill. The locality of this second photograph captioned as 'Common Tern' has been confirmed as also being from Vengurla Rocks (Sateesh Pande in litt.), which is further evidence of a new race of Roseate Tern for the Indian Subcontinent and also solves the mystery of the origin of the red-billed race recorded off the Goan coast.

In this region, there are no races, previously known to have an all red bill. *S. d. bangsi* has according to Olsen & Larsson (1995), in the breeding season, a bill, with up to 50% red and

20-22mm of black at the tip. Beaman & Madge (1998) also describe *bangsi* as having a red bill with a black tip in the breeding season 'resembling Common Tern' although Porter *et al.* (1996) states that the bill of bangsi 'becomes red in July' and fails to mention the black tip. *S. d. korustes* has a red bill 'with the terminal third blackish' in the breeding season (Ali & Ripley 1983) and this is illustrated and described in subsequent literature as being clearly black tipped in the breeding season (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Kazmierczak & van Perlo 2000, Harrison 1999).

S. d. korustes is known to breed in the Maldives, Sri Lanka and the Bay of Bengal from India to Burma (Harrison 1985, Olsen & Larsson 1995, Ash & Shafeeg 1994), and *S. d. bangsi*, the Arabian Sea and west Indian Ocean to New Guinea (Harrison 1985, Olsen & Larsson 1995). The only race previously recognised from the Indian Subcontinent is *korustes* (Ali & Ripley 1983, Abdulali 1970, Abdulali 1981, Ash & Shafeeg 1994). This race is described as having darker upper-parts than *dougallii*, with a grey rump, the same colour as the upperparts (Cramp 1985, Olsen & Larsson 1995). The colour of the upperparts of adult Roseate Terns migrating south past the Goan coast was near white (pers. obs.). HL and GF (pers. comm.) reported a rosy flush to the under-parts of birds seen closely at Chapora estuary/Morjim beach which can be seen in the photographs discussed, although according to Cramp (1985) this feature is absent in tropical populations, except at the start of the breeding season.

It is highly probable that the red-billed birds recorded at Goa are all from the breeding population at Vengurla Rocks, which may belong to, or be closely allied to the form *aridensis*, from East Africa and the Seychelles, which has an all-red bill during the breeding season (Skerrett *et al.* 2001) and which is generally lumped in *bangsi* (Cramp 1985) although treated as a separate subspecies by Olsen & Larsson (1995).

There have only been wing remains taken from Vengurla Rocks (Abdulali 1942a), so further details of the race from the breeding colony needs to be ascertained. In his checklist for the Birds of Maharashtra, Abdulali (1981) lists the race of Roseate Tern at Vengurla Rocks as *korustes* but later in Abdulali (1983) on the subject of a trip to Vengurla, to identify Roseate Terns he wrote 'In view of the element of uncertainty attached to the identification of *S. dougalli* (sic) and the possibility of having over-looked some of the other oceanic species occasionally washed into Bombay during the monsoon, I had always wanted to make a visit during, or as close as possible to, their breeding period, presumably during the monsoon,' but he failed also at that time, to positively identify the species, let alone the subspecies.

The only specimen of Roseate Tern in the Bombay Natural History Society collection is of the race korustes, which was collected in the Andaman Islands (Abdulali 1970). At the Government Museum Madras (Chennai), Abdulali (1942) reported a group case showing a pair of *korustes* hovering over eggs labelled 'Rameswaram Island-June 1914,' which he verified as to identity, date and location. Rameswaram Island, is part of the island 'bridge' between Tamil Nadu, India and Sri Lanka.

In the Maldives, Roseate Terns were examined in the hand and identified as *korustes* (Ash & Shafeeg 1994).

Further research and detailed photographs are needed of the roosting Roseate Terns at Chapora estuary/Morjim beach and Vengurla Rocks, which are extremely difficult to visit

Crested Tern *Sterna bergis* Adult breeding Pl. Michaelmas Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Australia. 19.5 2004. *Photo:* NG Cheshire.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Michaelmas Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Australia. 19.5 2004. *Photo:* NG Cheshire.

Crested Tern *Sterna bergis*, Michaelmas Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Australia, 19.5 2004. *Photo:* NG Cheshire.

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*, 36°42'S 170' 27'W. 5.6. 2001. *Photo:* NG Cheshire.

Blue-faced Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) on board *MS Roxanne* 12°53'S 36°17'W. June 2003. *Photo:* Capt Thomas Johannsson.

Neotropic Cormorant *(Phalacrocorax brasilianus)* in non-breeding plumage. Bolivar Flats, Texas, USA. 20.11.99. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

(Northern) Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes (chrysocome) moseleyi*), Nightingale Island, April 2003. *Photo:* Steve Hales.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Michaelmas Cay, Great Barrier Reef, Australia, 19.5.2004. *Photo*: NG Cheshire.

Gough Albatross (*Diomedea (exulans) dabbenena*), Gough Island, April 2003. *Photo:* Steve Hales.

Fairy Tern (*Gygis alba*), Ascension Island. Feb 2004. *Photo:* Lt Col R Dickey.

King Penguins (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*), South Georgia, Feb 2003. *Photo:* G D Lewis.

during the breeding season although Pande *et al.* (2003) obtained photographs from there at that time. Further remains from Vengurla should be sought, in the breeding/post-breeding season, in order to ascertain the exact race breeding there. The unlikely possibility that the phenomenon of the all red-bill may be a normal but as yet unknown condition of the Roseate Tern race *korustes* during the breeding season needs to be ruled out before acceptance of a new as yet undefined race for the subcontinent is confirmed.

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AN ATLANTIC ODYSSEY 2003

By Steve Hales

Yellow-billed Sheathbill *(Chianis alba)*, South Shetland Islands, 2003.
Photo: S Hales.

This expedition started in Ushuaia, Argentina and sailed to the South Shetlands and the Antarctic Peninsula. From here we made for the South Orkneys and South Georgia where we spent three days. The ship then headed north to Gough Island and the Tristan Group. After three days here we sailed to St Helena and then after a further three days set forth for Ascension. Just two days were spent here and then on to the Cape Verde Islands, where we spent another two days. Two days on the Azores were the final island group visited before returning to the UK

On the South Shetlands we made our first contacts with Chinstrap Penguins *Pygoscelis antarctica* and Gentoo Penguins *Pygoscelis papua* . Here also were many McCormick's Skuas Catharacta *[skua] maccormicki* and Yellow-billed Sheathbills *Chionis alba* which wandered attentively amongst the colonies. In a small bay a Chinstrap had fallen prey to a Leopard Seal *Hydrurga leptonyx* and the event was watched from close quarters.

Our first Snow Petrel *Pagadroma nivea* was seen through driving snow at Brown Bluff on the Antarctic Peninsula. It was a magnificent bird, the flight path recalling a nightjar or even a large bat, its vivid white plumage contrasted heavily against a backdrop of grey. At Hope Bay we saw more Snow Petrels and later that afternoon a single Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica* was observed in the Fridghof Sound.

At Devils Island the following morning the sun shone on a mirror-like sea. Many Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* flew about the ship. Ashore the Adelie Penguins *Pygoscelis*

adeliae delighted us as we watched them go about their daily routines. We then sailed slowly through many icebergs in the Weddel Sea to Paulet Island, where we saw the large colony of breeding Antarctic Shags *Leucocarbo [atriceps] bransfieldensis*.

Sailing the next day towards the South Orkneys we found ourselves in a sea rapidly freezing over with large blocks of ice and many spectacular tabular icebergs. In places the sea resembled a thick soup. However the birding was fantastic with large flocks of Snow and Antarctic Petrels. Many were sat on the frozen sea and others were resting on icebergs. Later that same morning we saw three Emperor Penguins *Aptenodytes forsteri* standing on an ice floe. The captain stopped the ship and slowly moved alongside them in order to get us a better view. By the end of the day we had seen good numbers of Cape Petrels *Daption capense* and Southern Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialodes*.

Leaving the South Orkneys we sailed through the Orwell and Washington Straits. The sight of thousands of Chinstrap Penguins was quite spectacular. Some were in the water but most were stood on Powell Island in dense groups from the shore-line right up to the top of the landmass. Alongside us there was a gathering of an estimated seven hundred Shags fishing and in with them many Southern Giant Petrels *Macronectes giganteus* and Antarctic Terns *Sterna vittata* had joined in the feeding frenzy.
The journey to South Georgia saw us sailing through some heavy storms and driving snow. Here amongst many other species we saw good numbers of Blue Petrels *Halobaena caerulea* but it was hard to count them accurately as they formed a 'wall of birds' up against, but just in front of, the rapidly advancing weather fronts.

At South Georgia the wildlife and scenery lived up to its acclaim. We enjoyed the King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* and Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus* colonies and whilst on an evening cruise coming out of the Drygaiski Fjord in storm force winds we saw thousands of seabirds coming in from the ocean returning to the island. A visit to Bird Island was also made where we saw the breeding Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans*. Back on the shoreline feeding amongst the kelp we saw several South Georgia Pipits *Anthus antarcticus* and in the shallow water Antarctic Fur seals *Arctocephalus gazella* were almost jumping out of the water trying to attack and bring down the feeding terns.

From here we set off for Tristan da Cuhna. On one day we saw two White-headed Petrels *Pterodroma lessonii* and later that same afternoon a raft of thirty Grey Petrels *Procellaria cinerea*. With favourable winds we made good time and diverted to Gough Island. Superlatives cannot describe the visual impact as we approached the island. There were thousands of birds wherever you looked. Probably the most dramatic memory was the high numbers of Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis elegans* and Atlantic Petrels *Pterodroma incerta* . As we neared the island we watched with awe as hundreds of birds were wheeling around in the air above the sheer cliffs and high tumbling waterfalls. We anchored on the leeward side in Quest Bay and zodiaced up to the shoreline. Landings are strictly forbidden but we managed to see Gough Buntings *Rowettia goughensis* flitting amongst the larger rocks and at the entrance to The Glen, (the base for the Cambridge Expedition.) we saw through the binoculars several Gough Moorhens *Gallinula [nesiotis] comeri* walking about on the vivid green mounds of moss. We left Gough Island with some wonderful memories and a realisation as to why this island is so special.

From here we sailed to Tristan da Cuhna where we spent three wonderful days. On day one we landed on the island in perfect weather. The islanders were very hospitable and very friendly. On the second day we weather had deteriorated and we took a cruise around Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands, but on the third day the weather improved and the Tristan guides were able to join us for a visit to Nightingale Island. Walking amongst the tall tussock grass with Conrad Glass whilst hundreds of Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* flew above us crash landing in the vegetation and shooting out from beneath our feet was truly remarkable. The remains of predated prions at the skua middens were all too evident as they littered the path. Young Yellow-nosed Albatrosses *Diomedea chlororhynchos* watched our progress up the path to the summit. Back on the rocky beach we saw Tristan Thrushes *Nesocichla eremita* and Tristan Buntings *Nesospiza acunhae* and also the dapper Northern Rockhopper Penguins *Eudyptes (chrysocome) moseleyi* - in fresh plumage and looking smart. Setting back for Tristan to drop off the guides we were told that we could visit Inaccessible Island and an hour or so later we were in the zodiacs on a calm sea making for the small beach. The island is rightly named and the cliffs were sheer and impressive with large numbers of Spectacled Petrels *Procellaria conspicilata* wheeling about them. Within minutes of landing we had found several of the small almost rodent-like Inaccessible Island Rails *Atlantisia rogersi* creeping just yards away from the sea. Thrushes foraged amongst the piles of seaweed but they quickly turned to examining the life jackets and camera bags left on the beach. Later we said goodbye and thanked our guides who left us in total darkness - their route back to the harbour lit by the ships powerful searchlights. We had been extremely privileged and will remember their kindness for a very long time.

From here we made for St Helena. Sea watching was quiet except for a few Spectacled Petrels which followed the ship for a couple of days and then we started picking up Bulwer's Petrels *Bulweria bulwerii*. Both Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* and Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* put in appearances. With three days at St Helena we had plenty of time to look around. A fishing boat was chartered on the second morning and we circumnavigated the island checking over the smaller islands for breeding seabirds. The waters around the island were rich in cetaceans and we saw large numbers of various dolphin species and several Whale Sharks *Rhincodon typus*. Madeiran Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma castro* were seen and breeding Brown *Anous stolidus* and Black Noddies *Anous minutus* on the guano covered cliff edges. Juvenile Brown *Sub leucogaster* and Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra* looked down on us with inquisitive stares. Whilst here we could not miss seeing the Wirebird *Charadrius sanctaehelenae* and arranged road transport to see them on Deadmoor Plain.

We now headed for Ascension Island. Sea birds were very few and far between in the hot balmy days. A steady trickle of Arctic Terns heading north kept interests up and when passing over the Grafton Seamount we had magnificent views of twenty or so Sperm Whales *Physeter macrocephalus* which were breaching and blowing around us. We spent two days at Ascension and on the second day circumnavigated the island in order to view Boatswain Bird Island. As we neared it we saw large numbers of boobies and frigate birds wheeling about in the air. Yellow-billed *Phaethon lepturus* and Red-billed Tropicbirds showed well and we managed to make a short zodiac trip around the leeward side of the island. From here we found several Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula* although trying to photograph them from a zodiac was not so

easy! Many feathers were floating down from above onto the sea and the Noddies were quickly picking them up and using them for their nests. We left Ascension that same evening.

The following day two large flocks of Long-tailed Skuas were recorded - totalling over 400 birds and many Madeiran Storm-petrels. At 04:13N 19:10W some of the group saw what were considered to be two Swinhoe's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma monorhis* feeding in amongst other birds. Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris (diomedea) edwardsi* were now appearing, their diagnostic features clearly visible. A few Red Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* were recorded and much closer to the ship several large Sunfish *Mola mola* were viewed - given away by their protruding fin!
Once at the Cape Verde Islands a day was spent on Santiago and whilst docking in Praia, Cape Verde Swift *Apus alexandri* and Iago's Sparrow *Passer iagoensis* were found and later we hired road transport and found Cape Verde Cane Warbler *Acrocephalus brevipennis* and further inland saw the nests of the colony of Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea bournei*, but could not find any herons. Leaving the port in the late afternoon we saw hundreds of Cape Verde Shearwaters, several Fea's Petrels *Pterodroma feae*, Cape Verde Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis boydi* and a single Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*, all flying and feeding amongst a large concentration of unidentified Pilot Whales. The next day we visited Sao Vincente. Mindelo was a bustling harbour with unfortunately more ship activity that bird life! Once again road transport was arranged and we visited the local sewage farm, where a large variety of waders were seen looking magnificent in their summer plumages and then on to the airport where we found a group of Cream-coloured Coursers *Cursorius cursor exsul* and their young just off the runway.

The Azores were our final call and as we headed towards them numbers of Arctic Terns rapidly increased. Small groups of them slowly overtook the ship as they flew determinedly northwards - often harried by skuas. A few Sabine's Gulls were also identified and on one morning two huge Fin Whales *Balaenoptera physalus* appeared alongside the ship giving wonderful views for several minutes.

The first island visited was Santa Maria. Seabirds were sparse here except for Yellow-legged Gull *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea*. The next day we visited San Miguel. Here the harbour held more seabirds and we added Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* and Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* to our list.

The passage to the UK revealed more Sabine's Gulls, quite a few Puffins *Fratercula arctica*, Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus*, Great Skuas *Catharacta skua*, Northern Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* and large numbers of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*. We had good close views one early morning of two Risso's Dolphins *Grampus griseus* off the stern.

The odyssey ended in Portland Harbour. It had been a fabulous seven weeks at sea. The opportunity to see so many seabirds from the Antarctic to the UK was certainly not to have been missed. Moreover it did make one realise that there is and will be a lot more to seabird conservation on a global scale than initially meets the eye!

SEA-WATCHING, GOA, INDIA

Anand Prasad

Sea watching 3 hours daily, between 6.30 and 10.00am, from 16/8 to 23/10/03, with several trips to Chapora estuary roost from 3/9 until 29/10/03.

Sea-watching from the coastal India is almost non-existent. Goa has been the only site with much coverage, although Sinclair (1977) spent several days observing between 26-28/10/74 and 17-20/10/74 at Colaba Point, Bombay and recorded White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*, Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*, Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Parasitic Jaeger (Skua) *Stercorarius pomarinus*, Pomarine Jaeger (Skua) *Stercorarius parasiticus* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. Earlier records of seabirds from the coast usually involved storm-wrecked specimens found on the shore in the Bombay area. Madsen (1990) also spent some time observing Jaegers (Skuas) *Stercorarius sp.* on the coast of Karnataka south of Goa. Heinz Lainer and Mark Newsome are to my knowledge the only other birders to have spent any time sea-watching in Goa during the southbound migration and Heinz Lainer is the only one to have recorded the lesser, northbound, spring migration. Lainer spent 3 years intensive seawatching in the late 1990's, the details of which are published in his 2 part paper 'The Birds of Goa' (Lainer 1999). For more recent records see Lainer 2004. Mark Newsome spent 2-3 hours per day sea-watching on 11 days between 25/8 and 8/9 2002, and kept detailed records which he had kindly sent me.

Mark Newsome arrived to find the migration in full swing on 25/8 with nearly 1000 Roseate/White-cheeked Terns *Sterna dougallii/repressa* recorded on that date and similarly high figures on 29/8 and 6/9. I was surprised to find that the migration was negligible before 25/8 and even afterwards generally at a much lower level than expected. I only experienced high figures, of about 300 Roseate/White-cheeked Terns, on one date, on 4/9, which was also the only day with moderate onshore wind. Mark also recorded Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* on much earlier dates than me and had a high count of 114 on 3/9 although he usually recorded figures of 20-40 daily. Both Mark and I failed to record any definite Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, which Heinz Lainer recorded in very large numbers. He recorded the migration from mid-August to early October but has records only from three years (HL pers. comm.) and it appears that the passage along the coast is highly variable and probably dependent on weather conditions in the Arabian Sea.

Heinz Lainer (1999) found the migration of White-cheeked and Bridled Tern, beginning in late August.

Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* is a species to be looked out for with strong on shore winds. Heinz Lainer recorded 407 migrating north, 2-9-km offshore Anjuna, on 23/9/01 (Pittie 2002) and Heinz Lainer and Gordon Frost observed this species in high winds at Cabo de Rama in southern Goa, undated (GF pers. comm. 9/03).

Bad weather, if you are lucky enough to encounter it, is definitely the time to brave the elements. The records of frigatebird *Fregata sp* and Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* were both at the front of a particularly black squall from the south-west which, from which I an glad to say I resisted fleeing too early.

The Common names, taxonomy and scientific nomenclature follows Lindsey & Duckworth 1996. The sequence follows Ripley 1982.

Highlights

Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata:* 12+ mutual soaring and playing on 7/9, 1 on 12/9, 1 on 17/9 and 1 on 19/9; all from Fort Aguada. Possibles at Fort Aguada: 2 on 30/8 (DS), 1 on 5/9, 1 on 18/9, 1 on 22/9, 12 on 23/9.
'Uncommon off-shore passage migrant in smallish numbers. These terns either participate or are simply swept along, in ones and twos, in the annual mass migration of *S. anaethetus.* Immature birds are predominant,' (Lainer 1999).

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus:* 1 on 27/9 from Fort Aguada.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger:* 1 on 27/10 at Chapora estuary.

Juvenile Frigatebird *Fregata sp.:* 1 close in on 27/10 off Fort Aguada. Probably a Great Frigatebird, (size comparison with Great Crested Tern, very large!) White head and bill. Complete dark upper-breast collar. White breast patch was thought to be just possibly extending on to the axillaries and was approximately heart shaped, i.e. wider towards the head.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus:* 1 at Chapora estuary on evening of 10/10. Not present in afternoon of next day.

Pomarine Jaeger (Skua) *Stercorarius pomarinus*: 1-2 on 28/8, 1 on 9/9, 2 on 21/9, 1 on 22/9, 1 on 24/9, 1 on 28/9, 1 on 1/10, 1 on 2/10, 3 on 5/10,2 on 6/10, 5 on 11/10, 4 on 13/10, 2 on 14/10, 1 on 15/10, 1 on 16/10, 1 on 19/10.

Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua) *Stercoranus parasiticus:* 1 on 28/8, 2 on 1/9, 1 on 24/9, 2 on 27/9, 2 on 28/9, 3 on 7/10, 1 on 9/10, 2 on 11/10,7 on 12/10, 2 on 13/10,2 on 14/10, 1 on 16/10.

Pomarine/Parasitic Jaeger: 5 on 19/8, 2 on 27/8, 1 on 4/9, 3 on 11/9, 1 on 13/9, 1 on 20/9, 1 on 22/9, 1 on 29/9, 1 on 3/10, 4 on 9/10, 2 on 11/10.

Peak Jaeger (Skua) counts of 7 on 12/10 and 6 on 13/10.

Unidentified large Whale: 1 on 22/10, far offshore Fort Aguada.

Other records of interest

Unidentified Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sp.* 1 landing on sea off Aguada on 27/8.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea:* First recorded, 12 on 29/9 at least.

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus:* First recorded on 5/9 off Aguada.

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia:* First recorded on 11/10 at least, off fort Aguada.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta:* First recorded on 8/8 at Chapora estuary.

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis:* First recorded on 11/10.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta:* First recorded on 12/10 at Chapora estuary.

Garganey *Anas querquedula:* First recorded on 12/10 at Chapora estuary.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata:* 14 on 10/10 at Chapora estuary. 13 in flight on 12/10 at Fort Aguada.

Unidentified Buzzard *Buteo sp.:* 1 on 20/10 at Fort Aguada and 1 on 18/10 at Arpora woods.

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus:* First recorded on 13/10 near Chapora.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus:* First recorded on 12/10 near Candolim.

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax:* 1 probable on 18/10 above Arpora woods.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis:* common after 24/10 with 10+ behind Calangute. Also behind Candolim.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus:* First recorded on 10/9 at Divar Island.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus:* First recorded on 28/10 at Chapora estuary.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus:* Winter race on 24/9 at least. Resident race *peregrinator* present on several days hunting from the beached ship at Candolim/Aguada.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis:* 1 on 29/10 at Fort Aguada.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus:* 1-3 (generally 2) present at Chapora estuary from 3/9 until 29/10. Also singles in flight at Fort Aguada on 11/9, 19/9 and on 10/10.

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum:* 1 on 10/9 at Divar Island, seen with Heinz Lainer, Gordon Frost and David Stanton.

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea:* First recorded on 15/10 at Chapora estuary.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola:* First recorded on 5/9 at Fort Aguada.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva:* First recorded on 10/10 (at least), at Chapora estuary.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: First recorded on 7/10 at Chapora estuary.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus:* First recorded on 13/9.

Curlew *Numenius arquata:* First recorded on 27/9.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa:* 1 at Chapora estuary on 28/9.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica:* 2-5 (generally 5) present at Chapora estuary from 3/9 until 29/10.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia:* Chapora estuary.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola:* First recorded near Chapora estuary on 1919.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus:* First recorded on 9/9 at Chapora estuary

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenana interpres:* 1 at Chapora estuary on 3/9, 1 at 9/9.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris:* 2 on 25/9, 2 & 2 on 2/10 and 2 possibles on 22/9 & 27/9 off Fort Aguada.

Sanderling *Calidris alda:* 1 on 14/9, 2 on 26/9, 1 on 28/9, 1 on 12/10, 1 on 13/10, 2 on 14/10, all at Chapora estuary. And 1 on 11/9 at Moijim Beach.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta:* First recorded on 15/9 at Chapora estuary.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: 1 on 11/9 at Morjim Beach. At Chapora estuary, 1 on 14/9, 2 on 26/9, 1 on 8/10, 1 on 10/10, 1 on 21/10, 1 on 28/10, 1 on 29/10.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea:* 1 on 12/10 at Chapora estuary.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus:* Up to 9 present on most visits to Chapora estuary from 3/9 until 19/9 at least (inc. 9/9). Also 7 at Divar island on 10/10.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax:*1 on 15/9, 2 on 2/10 at Chapora estuary.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini:* First recorded on 17/8, and then numbers slowly inceasing.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans:* First recorded on 21/8, and then numbers slowly increasing.

Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyaetus:* First recorded on 13/9, and then numbers slowly inceasing.

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus:* First recorded on 12/9, and then numbers slowly inceasing.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus:* Arrives late. Numbers had not yet built up by late October. First recorded, 12 on 10/10 at Fort Aguada. Also 20 noted on 23/10 at Fort Aguada.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei:* First recorded on 9/10. Also recorded on 10/10 and 23/10, all at Chapora estuary. Distinctly smaller than Brown-headed, not larger as in the field guides.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus:* Common at Chapora estuary and present on virtually all visits. Large flock of 50-60+ present for several days at Chapora estuary, from 16/9 to 11/10.

White-winged Tern *Childonias leucopterus:* 6+ on 9/9, 3-4 on 28/9, 9 on 29/9, 1+ on 4/10, 1 on 5/10, 1+ on 9/10, 1 on 11/10,6 on 13/10, up to 11 on 21/10.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica:* Common throughout.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia:* Recorded in small numbers on most days. First record on 4/9. High counts of 22 on 29/9, 40 on 4/10, 40 on 5/10, roosting at Chapora estuary.

River Tern *Sterna aurantia:* Scarce in Goa. 1 on 26/10 in Chapora estuary.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo:* Birds resembling White-cheeked Tern but with a white tail and presumed to be Common Tern were seen on most sea-watching days. All medium size terns (usually solitary birds) seen closely at Chapora estuary on several days were also identified as Common Tern, based primarily on the white tail and upper-tail covers. Some individuals were seen well enough to see the dark outer webs and white inner webs of the outer tail feathers. Heinz Lainer maintains that Common Tern is a rare bird in Goa (HL pers. comm., Lainer 2004).

It should be pointed out that the description of an ivory tipped bill in the museum diagnosis of White-cheeked Tern in *Ali & Ripley 1983* is not diagnostic and appears to be more a feature common to Common Tern (see photographs in *Blomdahl et al.* 2003 and Enticott & Tipling 1997 and Olsen & Larson 1995).

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii:* Much lower numbers than expected. Recorded on migration in medium size numbers on virtually all days. The highest flock count was 100+ feeding for at least 30 minutes close off Anjuna on 18/9. The all-red bill described by Heinz Lainer was clearly visible on all the birds seen well (HL pers. comm., Birds of Goa by HL in prep). Highest daily count was 170 on 22/9. Small numbers still found migrating on the last seawatching day, the 23rd October.

Mark Newsome had a peak count of 810 on 29/8 with numbers of over 300 on 5 other dates out of a total of 11 days sea-watching. Heinz Lainer's data (Lainer 1999) is somewhat dated and is presumably corrected in Lainer 2004. 'Scarce post-monsoon passage migrant in small numbers. In August and September, singles and small groups of up to 5 birds were observed travelling southwards with the steady stream of migrating *S. repressa*.' (Lainer 1999).

White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa:* Much lower numbers than expected. Recorded on migration in medium size numbers on virtually all days. Peak count of 200-300 migrating on 4/9, a day with the strongest wind (but still only with little scope shake). Small numbers still found migrating on the last sea-watching day, the 23rd October. 'A roughly estimated 15,000 individuals pass between end August and mid-October along Goa's coast.' (Lainer 1999).

Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus:* Much lower numbers than expected. Recorded in small numbers most days only from 30/8 to 1/10. Highest number on 17/9. 'Regular off-shore passage migrant in very large but highly fluctuating numbers. Over 28,000 birds were counted during a quantitative survey in 1996. The first turn up during the end August. By mid-September, a massive southward migration sets in, with birds passing at a peak of over 2,000 per hour. This slows down towards late September and peters out by the first week of October.' (Lainer 1999).

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons:* First recorded on 6/9 at Fort Aguada. Recorded in low numbers, often solitary birds at Chapora estuary. Also recorded in low numbers at Aguada on several days, e.g. 4 on 6/9, 4 on 15/9, 6 on 4/10, 2 on 5/10, 6 on 10/10.

Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii:* Common throughout.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis:* Common throughout.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis:* Fairly common throughout. Although difficult to identify in flight, there were always many roosting on Chapora estuary.

Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus:* 2 on 12/10 near Calangute. 1 on 14/10 at Candolim.

European Roller *Coracias garrilus:* 1 on 14/10 at Fort Aguada.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla:* First recorded on 10/10 at Chapora estuary.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia:* 1 on 1/11 at Fort Aguada.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui:* 1 on 19/10 at Fort Aguada, about 1 km from the coast. (Previously unknown away from the Western Ghat Forests).

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitanus:* First recorded on 8/10 at Fort Aguada.

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Adult Dolphin Gull *(Larus scoresbii)* in non-breeding plumage, Pebble Island, Falkland Islands, 28.11.96. *Photo:* Sam Alexander.

THE COMMON GULL WINTERING IN CONSTANTA HARBOUR

by Gabriel Banica

The Common Gull *(Larus canus)* is distributed within northern hemisphere, having a Circumpolar range. The most abundant European breeding bird populations occur in Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, Finland, Russia, Denmark.

After nesting period, the gulls start their migration towards the wintering areas (or the Main Survival Area). For example, the gulls which nest in Finland, winter westwards 14 E, in Denmark, the North Sea coast and Britain.

Most of the European gulls winter in the Southern area of the Baltic Sea and North Sea and a few of them reach the Mediterranean Sea.

In some of the identification guides, the western coast of the Black Sea is also mentioned for wintering. Although the origin of the birds which winter here is not known.

According to our observations, Romanian littoral is a wintering area for this gull species. Thus, in the period of 10.01.2004 - 25.02.2004 a number of 1000 - 4000 gulls wintered in Constanta Harbour (Romania). The birds chose a basin with a low traffic.

We consider that the western coast of the Black Sea is an important wintering place for the Common Gull.

We hope that the future studies will solve the problem of their origin.

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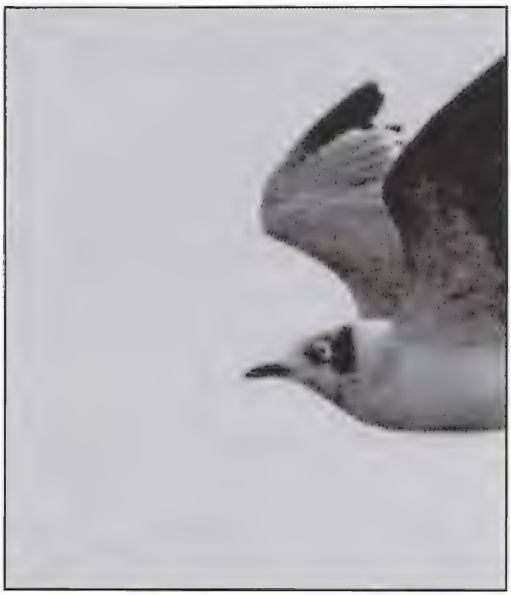
ROMANIA

FRANKLIN'S GULL *(Larus pipixcan)* IN SUB ANTARCTIC WATERS

The photograph below of a Franklin's Gull *(Larus pipixcan)* was taken by Dick Newell from *rv Professor Molchanov* whilst on an Antarctic cruise in January 2004. The bird was located at 59 34 S 46 25W in the West Scotia Basin, NNW of the South Orkney Islands. It is believed to be the most southerly record of this North American Gull; the previous most southerly report from the RNBWS database is a 1986 record from the Falkland Islands.



Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixan* 59° 34'S, 46° 25'W, Jan 2004. *Photo:* D Newell.

EXERCISE BOOBY IX

By Captain Pete Carr RM

The author ringing in a Sooty Tern fair. Feb 2004. *Photo:* Lt Col R Dickey.

The Expedition and Some Background

Exercise Booby IX was an Army Ornithological Society (AOS) led expedition to Ascension Island (AI) that took place between 09-20 Feb 04. Booby is a long-term commitment to AI by AOS, the first being held in 1988, (evolving from a RAFOS expedition the previous year) and is a continuing monitoring project of the islands' sea birds, in particular Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*. Seven serving Army ranks, a former Army and a former RAF member flew from RAF Brize Norton for the duration of the expedition. I was most fortunate to join the team for the first week, primarily employed as a bird ringer. Of interest, the Booby expeditions', albeit they are based upon ornithology, receive Adventurous Training status and therefore qualify for duty status - an important point for those participating.

For those who have not visited Ascension it is in recent times the halfway house for personnel serving in the Falkland Islands, being the staging point where you change aircraft. From a Royal Marines historians' perspective it is fascinating. Royal Marines were present on 'HMS Ascension' for over a hundred years until 1923 and the RM Barracks and their agricultural and hydrological endeavours being still very much in evidence. Latterly, the island is being marketed for ecotourism, focusing upon its stunning, stark beauty and unique oceanic bio-fauna.

Expedition members relaxing with friends in George Town, Feb 2004.
Photo: Lt Col R Dickey.

The aim of the expedition was 'to conduct an adventure training exercise by trekking in and around Ascension Island in order to undertake an ornithological survey of breeding birds'. The expedition tasks were six-fold and were:

a. To conduct a full scientific survey of the Sooty Tern fairs (breeding colonies).
b. A survey of Fairy Tern *Gygis alba* numbers.
c. A land bird survey covering the whole island.
d. The collecting of bio-chemical samples for various academic and scientific organisations.
e. A survey of Mesquite *Prosopsis juliflora* invading the Sooty Tern fairs.
f. Training of the AI Conservation Officers in ringing birds.

This article is not intended to be an expedition report, the full results from Booby IX will be published in due course, this is intended to be a report on the expedition.

A Bootneck's Perspective

The expedition proved successful in all its aims and in my humble opinion (and being a keen Munroist), more than qualifies for Adventure Training status.

The daily routine when working in the tern fairs would be to rise early and immediately commence drinking as much fluid as possible prior to leaving the accommodation area for a

'death march from hell' to the tern breeding grounds. This would invariably mean a 'stiff' yomp through slide-under-your-feet ash fields and over precarious and potentially lethal pyroclastic flows, normally with a few thigh-busting inclines thrown in for good measure. The day for me was then spent ringing or training ringing in amongst several thousand nesting terns that protested your presence in their midst by pecking at feet or head depending upon if they were airborne or not, or, if being handled, by defecating or regurgitating on me. As the day wore on and the temperature passed 100 degrees the deposits left by irate tern parents encrusted in my hair and clothing and the smell became worse than a bootnecks' cabin after a long weekend spent on board in Amsterdam. When combined with strength sapping dehydration, heat that made you feel like your skin was being stretched taut and rocks that when touched missed no opportunity to carve tattoos in exposed skin, made one question one's devotion to ornithological research. Better would follow though, in true Mad Dogs and Englishmen fashion, as the sun reached its zenith we would be ordered off the volcanic debris to march our way back to safety.

Better still were the land bird surveys. Here one would be dropped off by a four wheel drive at a desolate lunar looking spot and then have to make your way to another point several kilometres away whilst recording all birds seen in between. It seemed if you were a Royal, your route would most likely involve a direct descent in to a Mesquite encased crater with special escalating ash sides followed by an ascent up one of the unclimbed-for-good-reason mountainous feature of Green Mountain, the main volcano. Had I been checking out a rumoured sighting of the extinct Kakawahie *Paroreomyza flammea* on the slopes of a Hawaiian

Looking out to Boatswain Bird Island, Feb 2004. *Photo:* Lt Col R Dickey.

ash heap with Pina Colades and dancing girls on tap later the exertion may have seemed justified. With Ascension only having an extremely limited number of introduced land birds, the majority of them very familiar, (for example Canary *Serinus serinus*), the realisation I was conducting mountain training in a freak heat wave for few results nearly resulted in a dampening of spirits.

An Ornithologist's Perspective

The results of the research published through Booby's endeavours over the past decade has assisted in bringing Ascension Island its' present day conservation policies. The total eradication of feral cats introduced from ships, that killed off the immense seabird colonies that once existed on the mainland was based partly upon results collected by Service expeditions. There has also been an extensive rat control programme on the island based upon the same. In essence, the work by service personnel that conservation bodies have based their findings upon have built upon the work of eminent ornithologists such as Drs N P Ashmole, W R P Bourne and K E L Simmons and have resulted in a groundbreaking programme of conservation measures being implemented in a British Overseas Territory. The beauty of the Booby concept is that it will continue in to the future assisting the Foreign and Common Wealth Office and the Ascension Island conservation workers by monitoring the affects of the cat and rat eradication on the seabird colonies. It is likely the eradication and control of these two pests will have an effect on the seabirds; it is hoped the greatest effect will be the return to the mainland of the once vast sea bird breeding colonies.

So What?

For those of you thinking of volunteering to join one of the forthcoming tri-service ornithological expeditions I can but recommend it. The camaraderie and conservation contribution experienced will remain with you long after the flight home. Details of future expeditions can be obtained from either the RNBWS Secretary or Expedition Member.

A final thought: Oceanic islands with a UK military presence are an obvious and excellent place for the Service ornithological societies to conduct long-term research and conservation based activities. The Army Ornithological Society has seized the opportunity to assist in the conservation of Ascension Island and has already made a massive contribution. The Royal Navy Birdwatching Society has the opportunity in the Chagos archipelago to make a massive contribution to the conservation of this unique and under researched area. The template and example has been set by AOS, the opportunity for RNBWS should not be lost.

OBITUARY

Captain D.M. (Dave) Simpson MN (1942-2002)

Dave Simpson was a valued and close personal friend for over 20 years, through our regular exchanges of letters and draft articles for *Sea Swallow*, but sadly we never met. He first came to the notice of Captain Gerald Tuck, my predecessor as Chairman RNBWS and Editor, probably through the close links Gerald established with the Meteorological Office. He arranged for extracts of weather reporting ships' observations of birds to be forwarded to him, and encouraged promising observers to join the RNBWS. Many other distinguished members from the Merchant Navy joined in this way, and Dave did so, in 1966. He was born in Stockton-on-Tees in 1942, and was brought up in Whitby, and joined the Merchant Navy, as cadet at Hull Trinity House School of Navigation, in 1957, obtaining his Master Mariner's certificate of competence at the age of 26. He spent the rest of his seafaring career in the Far East, with the Swire Pacific Offshore Company, of Hong Kong.

Dave's first contribution appears in *Sea Swallow 20:* 39 (1968), under the name of 2nd Officer D.M. Simpson, covering detailed observations in Far Eastern Waters. When I assumed the mantle as analyst of all landbird records aboard ships, the initials DMS featured in the analysis for Persian Gulf (Table H), in 1977. Thereafter, Dave contributed articles covering his observations of migration off Borneo (SS 32), Bombay waters (SS 33) and the Persian Gulf SS (36). But Dave will be best remembered for his unique series of articles, from 1987-97, describing his remarkable experiences commanding *MV Kiunga Chief* and other copper ore carriers operating up and down the Fly River, Papua New Guinea. Low waters frequently caused grounding on mud-banks allowing him to pursue his passion for birdwatching ashore in the surrounding forest habitats, during which he acquired an impressive list of unusual identifications. He was deeply concerned about the threat to this last unspoilt wilderness by excessive timber-felling and poisoning by chemicals leaching from the copper and gold mines, and was a powerful voice campaigning to conserve this area, as a National Park.

He regularly used his brother Edward's address in Whitby, Yorkshire, but he very rarely visited the UK, choosing to spend his leave-periods birding locally, resulting in yet more fascinating records and articles from many offshore islands in Indonesia and the Philippines. He met Neil Cheshire in South Australia, when on holiday there in 1987. Stan Howe kindly scanned the RNBWS database (of all records published in pages of *Sea Swallow*) to discover that, between the years 1966-98, Dave contributed a total of 1,570 records from over 450 sites of 551 species. As Stan comments: 'No one else approached this quantity of records'.

The task of editing his contributions was a major challenge; this was before the days of e-mails and communications were 'precarious'. He wrote his first report on the Fly River in 1988 which he gave to a shipmate who was flying back to the UK. As he wrote: 'the fellow who was carrying it has since been sacked from the company, so I guess I picked a bad courier'. The report never reached RNBWS, and in the following year he re-wrote it Dave's manuscripts were notoriously difficult to decipher (very occasionally he borrowed a very antique type-writer) and postal delays to the drafts and proofs often took months. But his

detailed records were meticulously accurate and spiced with humour: describing his pursuit of some unfamiliar shearwaters off Bougainville Island (PNG), in January 1990 (SS 39: 65) he wrote: 'I headed the ship right at them....Reluctantly, I had to call off the chase as the flock was edging towards the beach!' He gave detailed descriptions and concluded: 'I firmly believe that these were a party of Heinroth's Shearwaters, in their home waters'.

In 1986 he had surgery for a brain-tumour in London, where Stephen Chapman visited him in hospital, but Dave was soon back on the Fly River. He subsequently bought a property at Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire, primarily as a base for local birdwatching, and to house his belongings. In what proved to be his last letter to me, in the summer of 1998, he wrote (SS 47:70) that he planned to continue his contract with Ok Tedi Mining on the Fly River until October, and then retire 'for real'. He often talked of living in Costa Rica, which was his 'Mecca' for birdwatching, and through him RNBWS received regular newsletters of the local birding club - the *'Tico Tweeter'*.

But he died in Lincolnshire, after a brief struggle with lung cancer, in February 2002. I did not learn of this until a solicitor's letter was received informing RNBWS that he had left a very generous legacy to this society. David Simpson was a true giant among seaborne birdwatchers, and a good friend to RNBWS. We shall honour his memory for decades to come. May he rest in peace.

Michael Casement

Adult White-eyed Gull *(Larus leucophthalmus)* near Hurghada, 31.3.2000.
Photo: Sam Alexander.

SEABIRDS: A NATURAL HISTORY

By Anthony J Gaston
T & A D Poyser 2004, £35, Hardback

ISBN 07136 65572

Tony Gaston has written a fascinating book, translating over 30 years of world-wide seabird research into a series of very readable chapters covering as many aspects of seabird life as you could wish to enquire about. Subjects covered vary from their adaptations to a marine existence, from drinking by seabirds to longevity, through small, plumage, polymorhism and island endemism. These, and relevant aspects of Oceanography and geography, as well as many biological and behavioural features are clearly and concisely discussed.

To prevent such subject matter from becoming too scientific and stuffy, the author has included many personal anecdotes and quotations. One of my favourites (pp 142 - 143) was his description of his camping visit to the breeding grounds of the Ancient Murrelet *(Synthliboramphus antiquus)* in the tall rain forests of the Queen Charlotte Islands of the Canadian Pacific coast; his very vivid account makes this an experience any avid birder would dream of sharing. This leads into a more sober discussion on the whys and wherefores of breeding colonially followed by all manner of features on the various nesting strategies employed by seabirds.

I love this book but feel that, despite many lovely colour photos and excellent washed illustrations by Dan Powell, the price is rather hefty for a book of only some 222 pages. This will put many people off buying it which is a great pity, as it deserves a wide readership. Mind you with Christmas looming it would be a nice thing to find under the tree on the said morn. It is an easy book to dip into, whether after the Queen's Christmas message or merely to liven up slack periods of a seawatch!

Steve Madge

Photographic Competition

This photograph was taken in the Northern Gulf onboard *HMS Edinburgh* in Spring 2003. Identification answers on a postcard to the Editor.

Joining Form

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Interested persons are invited to submit contributions for *Sea Swallow*; authors do not need to be RNBWS members. Material may take the form of papers, notes, progress reports, letters or reviews.
The style used in *Sea Swallow*, should be followed, with the standard abbreviations, nomenclature and use of references.
Manuscripts should ideally he typed in double spacing, together with figures and diagrams. Accompanying photographs are preferred as prints rather than slides. Those with facilities to do so are encouraged to send on IBM PC compatible 3.5" disc (specifying the word processing software used) or CD Rom, together with a hard copy print. ASCII back-tip text is also desirable.
Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition must reach the editor by 31 May.